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THE

WORKS

OF

THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

LATE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A

REVIEW OF HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER,

BY BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

A NEW EDITION,

IN SIX VOLUMES.

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Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

THESE words contain that great commission and charter, granted by our Saviour to his Apostles and their successors, by virtue of which we and all mankind have been called to the knowledge and practice of true religion, inforced by the motives of eternal felicity or misery. As it had been chiefly in Galilee, that he instructed his disciples before his death: so he appointed them to retire thither after his resurrection, that he might add to his instructions whatever then became proper; and more fully acquaint them with such things, as *pertained to the kingdom of God* *. There our Evangelists informs us, he appeared to them on a mountain: perhaps the same, on which he had begun to open the doctrine of Christianity, in that noble discourse, which we have in the fifth and following chapters of this gospel: and given them a specimen of his and their future

* Acts i. 3.

glory, at his transfiguration *. *When they saw him,* the generality immediately *worshipped him: but some,* we are told with the usual fairness of the sacred writers, *doubted* †. Whether these were only persons, who accompanied the Apostles, and had not yet seen him since he rose again: or whether some of the Apostles, themselves, who might not with certainty know him at a distance, is not clear. But the doubts of either could not but vanish when *Jesus came up* to them, as St. Matthew assures us he did, for so the original word signifies ‡, and conversed familiarly with them. Many such conversations he held with these his followers: for St. Luke in their Acts informs us, that they continued *forty days* §. But the substance of them all must be, what the text expresses: where, in consequence of that fulness of *power,* which he tells them, in the foregoing words, was *given him* over all things *in heaven and in earth; as the Father had sent him, he sends them* ‖, to *make disciples,* for that is the more accurate rendering ¶, not of the Jews alone, but of *all nations.* And that they may do it rightly and effectually, he distinctly sets forth,

I. The doctrines, they were to teach.

II. The duties they were to enjoin.

III. The protection and happiness, of which they might assure, both themselves, and all those, who faithfully preached his gospel, and who sincerely embraced it.

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I. The doctrines, they were to teach. These are briefly, but sufficiently, comprehended in the direction of *baptizing* men *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:* for the better understanding of which phrase, it will be proper to explain,

1. What is meant by being *baptized in the name* of any one, and particularly of these three.

2. What is the faith in these three, which our baptism requires us to profess.

1. For the completer apprehension of the former of these points, it will be useful to observe, that in our Saviour's days, it had been an ancient custom amongst the Jews, when any Gentile forsook idolatry, and believed the law of Moses, to receive him into their religion, amongst other ceremonies, by baptism: as indeed they had themselves been prepared for the reception of that law, by a solemn and religious washing, as we read Exod. xix. Nay even the Heathens made use of purifications by water, when they initiated, or entered, any one into the mysteries of their Deities. And this rite being not only thus universally used, but also naturally expressive of those two things, which, on professing Christianity, chiefly wanted to be expressed: a promise on our part, carefully to preserve ourselves pure, from the defilement of sin, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit: and a promise on God's part, graciously to consider us, as pure from the guilt of it, through the merits of his Son: therefore our blessed Lord condescended to make this the form of entering into his religion also. But at the same time he thoroughly distinguished the Christian baptism, both from that of the Heathens, who were baptized into superstitions and idolatrous follies; and from that of the Jewish Proselytes, who

were baptized, as the Apostle expresses it, into Moses*, by directing, that his followers should be *baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

In the language of Scripture, doing any thing in the name of God, signifies doing it by virtue of his authority. Thus our Saviour saith to the Jews, *I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: If another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive*†. In this sense baptism is administered in the name of the Holy Trinity, being a divine appointment, with a distinct reference to each of the three persons. And in this sense the phrase appears to have been used by St. Peter, when he *commanded* the family of Cornelius *to be baptized in the name of the Lord*‡: that is, by virtue of his commission *to baptize all nations.* Till that day, the Apostles had understood this only concerning Jews and Proselytes of all nations. But now, St. Peter being sent by express revelation to Cornelius, a Gentile; and perceiving, in the midst of his discourse to him and his friends, that, on their believing, *the Holy Ghost was fallen upon them* §, Gentiles as they were: after some astonishment, he argues very justly, *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we? and he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord* ‖: that is in pursuance of our Saviour's general directions.

But though the expression in the text undoubtedly implies this meaning, yet it comprehends a further one. For the phrase translated IN *the name,* is different from that in the passage relating to St. Peter, and signifies in strictness, INTO *the name of the Father,*

* 1 Cor. x. 2. † John v. 43. ‡ Acts x. 48.
§ Acts v. 44. ‖ Acts v. 47, 48.

Son, and Holy Ghost: which word, *into,* the New Testament uses nine times besides*, in speaking of baptism, whereas it uses a word signifying, *in,* at most but once besides†. The particular import of this term, I shall now explain to you.

It hath ever been usual, that the believers or professors of any doctrine should be called by a name, derived from the first or chief teacher of that doctrine. And by whatever form or ceremony they declared themselves his Disciples, by the same they were understood to take upon them his name. Thus the Jews, when, taking Moses for their prophet and guide, they followed him into the midst of the Red Sea, are said by St. Paul, in allusion to the water through which they passed, to have been *baptized into Moses*‡: which is equivalent to saying, that they

* Acts viii. 16. xix. 3. 5. Rom. vi. 3. 1 Cor. i. 13. 15. x. 2. xii. 13. Gal. iii. 27.

† Acts ii. 38.; where the preposition is επι. Now, επι τω ονοματι appears to signify the same thing as εν τω ονοματι. Matth. xxiv. 5. Mark ix. 39. xiii. 6. Luke ix. 49. xxi. 8. Acts iv. 18. v. 28. 40. Επι τω ονοματι signifies also *for the sake of,* or *from regard to;* Matth. xviii. 5. Mark ix. 37. Luke ix. 48.; and so doth εις το ονομα, Matth. x. 41, 42; as doth לשם. Thus the Samaritans circumcised their children לשם הר גריזים into the name of Mount Gerizim. Avoda Sara, fol. 27. 1. in Schoetg. Hor. Heb. in Matth. xxviii. 20; i. e. *devoted him to the worship there instituted;* of which Schwarzius, in his Exercitationes in Pent. Sam. Witemb. 1756, p. 51, saith the explanation is (as he cites it from the Talmudical book. מסכת הולין Edzardi Ed. Hamb. 1710, p. 42.) that they circumcised them לשם דמות בראש הר גריזים ועבדיו לה עבודה in, or into, the name of the image on the top of Mount Gerizim, which image they worship, and circumcise their children לשם היונה זה in, or into, the name of this dove. The only places where the phrase εις το ὀνομα occurs besides, are John i. 12. ii. 23. iii. 18. 1 John v. 13; where the phrase is πιστευειν εις το ονομα; and Matth. xviii. 20. συνηγμενοι εις το εμον ονομα. Here some understand it, *for my sake,* others *to pray in my name,* others *by virtue of my command.*

‡ 1 Cor. x. 2.

were baptized into the name of Moses. Not that in fact the Jews called themselves by his name, as the several sects of philosophers did by the names of their several leaders. For the doctrine, which Moses taught, was not his own: and the obedience, which he required, was not to himself; but to God, the Maker of heaven and earth. And therefore, when the Jews were thus baptized into Moses, they were at the same time, in a much higher sense, baptized into the name of God; taking that upon them, as an acknowledgment of their being his: for servants are known by the name of their lord. In Scripture therefore God himself stiles them, *My people, which are called by my name**. And they plead with him, *We are called by thy name, leave us not*†: and elsewhere declare, *All people will walk every one in the name of his God: and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever*‡. As then the Moabites were called by the name of their God, the people of Chemosh§; and the other idolatrous nations in like manner; so were the Israelites called by the name of the true God. And whoever by baptism, amongst other ceremonies, professed himself a convert to Judaism, he was, properly speaking, baptized into the same name.

When therefore the Christian religion was published; as proselytes to the old dispensation had been baptized into Moses, taking him for their lawgiver and instructor: so believers in the new were baptized into Christ, receiving him for their Lord and Master. And as the former were in effect baptized into the name of the one true God, assuming the denomination of his servants: so the latter, being more fully instructed concerning the object of worship,

* 2 Chr. vii. 14. † Jer. xiv. 9. In the Hebrew it is, *Thy name is called over us.* ‡ Mic. iv. 5. § Numb. xxi. 29. Jer. xlviii. 46.

were professedly and in form *baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost:* taking this name upon them, to believe in and obey for the future, as their badge of distinction from all other men. Whence our Saviour, in his prayer for his disciples, saith to the Father, *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me* *. And in his exhortation to the angel of the church of Pergamos, he saith, *Thou holdest fast my name and hast not denied my faith* †.

It must be acknowledged indeed, that being baptized into the name of these three, is no where expressly mentioned, except in the text. But then the more usual phrase, of being baptized into Christ, or into his name, amounts to just the same thing. For by bearing the name of Christians, we declare ourselves believers not in Christ alone; but in the Father, *of whom,* to use the Apostle's words, *the whole family in heaven and earth is named* ‡; and in the Holy Spirit also; whose name appears evidently never to have been omitted in baptism, from that remarkable passage §, where some professors of the Gospel owning that they were intirely ignorant concerning the Holy Ghost, St. Paul asks them, *Unto what then were ye baptized?* And finding it was only *into the baptism of John,* commands them to be now baptized, *into the name of the Lord Jesus* ‖. So it is expressed: but the foregoing question fully proves, that the name of the Holy Ghost was used likewise; from whence it follows, that the expression, *baptizing into the name of Christ,* wherever we find it in Scripture, is only put for shortness: and that

* John xvii. 11, 12. † Rev. ii. 13. ‡ Eph. iii. 15.
§ Acts xix. 1, 2, 3. ‖ Acts v. 3, 4, 5.

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* 2 Chr. vii. 14. † Jer. xiv. 9.
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*will I not give to another**, saith he himself. Accordingly St. Paul declares, that *to us* Christians, *there is one God the Father, of whom are all things*†. But then, besides the several orders of created beings, the same Scripture as expressly mentions his eternal Son and Spirit: the one begotten of him, the other proceeding from him. The distinct and full meaning of these terms we know not: but this, however, they plainly denote, that the Son and Spirit are derived from the Father, in a manner, whatever it be, each different from the other, and both different from creation. Accordingly we find ascribed to both these, not only the names, but the perfections of God, with honours and worship incommunicable to any creature: and while they are evidently distinguished from the Father, they are as evidently described as being one with him. Wherein precisely this union and this distinction lies, the Scripture hath not said, and therefore we cannot say, any farther than this: that the union appears to be not only a similitude of will, or of other powers and dispositions, but the highest possible sameness of essential attributes and properties; for which reason it hath been called an unity of essence, nature or substance: and the distinction appears to be, not only a difference of names, or of relations to created beings, but of subsistence and action, resembling in some measure, as described in Holy Writ, that of different human agents; on which account it is said to be a distinction of persons. And from all these things put together, we conclude, that we are to believe and worship three persons, who are one God.

Many other words and terms there are, besides these, which have been used in speaking of this great

* Isaiah xlii. 8. † 1 Cor. viii. 6.

mystery: some of them proper and useful, serving to express only what the Scripture expresses, and to guard it against misrepresentations; which therefore we should ever interpret candidly and favourably: others much better omitted: as indeed all are, that men employ to give any further knowledge of the subject, than God hath given. For in such cases, but in this above any, the true method is, to receive, with the utmost humility and simplicity of mind, what is revealed: neither adding, nor diminishing, nor one way or other attempting to make it, either clearer, or darker, than it is. The former we cannot do: the latter we easily may, but surely should not wish to do. Multiplying therefore phrases and reasonings, either to determine what the divine oracles have not determined, or to explain away what they have determined, is on both hands wrong; and hath often led very great men into unhappy errors, and very good men into fierce contentions: all which might be avoided, would they but be so modest, as neither to doubt of what the All-wise hath taught, nor pry into what he hath concealed; and so charitable, as never without the strongest reason to think ill of others, and never for any reason to do or wish ill to them.

There are certainly, in this wonderful doctrine, many things, concerning which, questions may be asked, which we can only answer by confessing our ignorance: and some things, against which objections may be raised, that we can solve no otherwise, than by reminding those, who make them, that such difficulties must be expected, whenever a finite mind attempts to view an infinite object. But, though, in the Holy Trinity, there is much, that can by no means be comprehended fully; which is what we intend to

say, by calling it *mysterious*, or above reason; (as indeed almost every thing is, in part, above ours:) yet, in what the Scripture requires us to believe concerning the Holy Trinity, there is nothing, which either cannot be at all understood; or which, when understood, is absurd and contrary to reason. Now whatever possibly may be true, we are bound, when a revelation, well attested, plainly teaches it, to believe actually is true. For faith in what God affirms, is unquestionably as necessary, as obedience to what he enjoins. And, little as we can see in matters of this high nature, we may notwithstanding sufficiently see very important motives for his injunction of faith in this doctrine: because from the distinction of persons in the Trinity, there arises a farther distinction of their relations to us, on which relations are founded distinct duties on our parts towards them: and very different from what they would be, if two of them were only creatures of exalted rank. The whole substance of Christianity is comprehended in considering, and accordingly honouring, (to express it in the well-known words of our Catechism) *God the Father*, as Him, *who hath made us and all the world; God the Son*, as Him, *who hath redeemed us and all mankind; God the Holy Ghost*, as Him, *who sanctifieth us and all the elect people of God.* Not but that each person concurs in each of these works: but still, finding in Scripture, that one is represented as more peculiarly and eminently concerned in one of them, and another in another; we justly distinguish the Father, Son, and Spirit, by the distinct offices of Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; and justly express the distinction in our prayers and praises, as well as in our Creed.

Thus, in the Revelation of St. John, the saints

glory, at his transfiguration *. *When they saw him,* the generality immediately *worshipped him: but some,* we are told with the usual fairness of the sacred writers, *doubted* †. Whether these were only persons, who accompanied the Apostles, and had not yet seen him since he rose again: or whether some of the Apostles, themselves, who might not with certainty know him at a distance, is not clear. But the doubts of either could not but vanish when *Jesus came up* to them, as St. Matthew assures us he did, for so the original word signifies ‡, and conversed familiarly with them. Many such conversations he held with these his followers: for St. Luke in their Acts informs us, that they continued *forty days* §. But the substance of them all must be, what the text expresses: where, in consequence of that fulness of *power,* which he tells them, in the foregoing words, was *given him* over all things *in heaven and in earth; as the Father had sent him, he sends them* ‖, to *make disciples,* for that is the more accurate rendering ¶, not of the Jews alone, but of *all nations.* And that they may do it rightly and effectually, he distinctly sets forth,

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*on the earth, and under the earth, heard I, saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him, that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever**. In this universal acclamation of praise, our hearts ought to join with the humblest gratitude: to reverence him continually as the *Lord of all*†; and in particular, besides the holy ordinance of baptism, to celebrate with the devoutest affection, that other solemn rite, which he hath instituted, commanding us, *This do in remembrance of me*‡. The distinct office of the third person, the Spirit, hath consisted from the beginning, first in revealing and confirming the truths of religion to men, from age to age, till the knowledge of them was completed in the New Testament; for *holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*§: then in disposing their minds, by the outward ministry of the Word, and the inward workings of his grace, to receive and obey them: giving those, who comply with his motions, strength against temptation, comfort under affliction, fervency in prayer, growth in goodness, reviving hope, and sometimes joyful assurance, of divine favour: All which operations tending wholly to improve us in piety and virtue, which together make up true sanctity or holiness, he is accordingly stiled the Sanctifier. And our duty to him plainly is, to be thankful to him for what he hath done, and pray for what he is ready to do, towards our salvation; never to *grieve*‖ *or do despite to*¶ *him* by wilful sin or negligence; but to learn from his instructions, and yield to his influences, that he may abide with us for ever, and make us, as the Apostle expresses himself, *temples of the Holy Ghost***.

* Rex. v. 8, 9. 11, 12, 13. † Acts x. 36. ‡ Luke xxii. 19.
§ 2 Pet. i. 21. ‖ Eph. iv. 30. ¶ Heb. x. 29. ** 1 Cor. vi. 19.

glory, at his transfiguration *. *When they saw him,* the generality immediately *worshipped him: but some,* we are told with the usual fairness of the sacred writers, *doubted* †. Whether these were only persons, who accompanied the Apostles, and had not yet seen him since he rose again: or whether some of the Apostles, themselves, who might not with certainty know him at a distance, is not clear. But the doubts of either could not but vanish when *Jesus came up* to them, as St. Matthew assures us he did, for so the original word signifies ‡, and conversed familiarly with them. Many such conversations he held with these his followers: for St. Luke in their Acts informs us, that they continued *forty days* §. But the substance of them all must be, what the text expresses: where, in consequence of that fulness of *power,* which he tells them, in the foregoing words, was *given him* over all things *in heaven and in earth; as the Father had sent him, he sends them* ‖, to *make disciples,* for that is the more accurate rendering ¶, not of the Jews alone, but of *all nations.* And that they may do it rightly and effectually, he distinctly sets forth,

I. The doctrines, they were to teach.

II. The duties they were to enjoin.

III. The protection and happiness, of which they might assure, both themselves, and all those, who faithfully preached his gospel, and who sincerely embraced it.

* Grot. in Loc. saith, There is ancient tradition for the last. See Rexland Palæst. p. 334, &c.

† v. 17. ‡ Προσελθων, v. 18. § Acts i. 3. ‖ John xx. 21.

¶ Μαθητευω is not used in the Septuagint: nor Μαθητης. In the New Testament it is found thrice, besides the text: and signifies to make Disciples, Acts xiv. 21. to be a Disciple, Matth. xxvii. 57. and in the passive voice may signify, to be made a Disciple, Matth. xiii. 52. It signifies also in Plutarch, to be a Disciple. See Steph. in Voc.

faith in them, that I thought it most natural to mention them together. And of the rest, it would be impossible at present to specify every one in particular. And therefore I shall only treat of the more general heads and divisions of them. By this commission of our blessed Lord then, the ministers of the Gospel are bound to teach, and the professors of the Gospel to observe, the precepts of piety, as well as morality; of revealed religion, as well as natural; difficult, as well as easy duties; those of self-government, as well as of social behaviour; *all things whatsoever he hath commanded*, and nothing else.

I. Precepts of piety, as well as morality. In some ages of the world the generality of persons, and in all too many, have almost intirely disregarded virtue, at least some parts of it, while yet they seemed very zealous in religion. That the *religion* of such *is vain**, requires little proof. Indeed it must be, either mere pretence, or gross mistake. Either they have really none of that devotion, which they profess, or it is devotion to an *unknown God*†. For did they at all apprehend his nature aright; the love of him could not but incline them to the love of whatever was good; and the fear of him could not but deter them from whatever was evil. These things are so easily demonstrable, and the mischiefs of not attending to them have been so dreadful; that wherever knowledge and liberty have prevailed, such wrong notions of duty to our Maker have (amongst the more considerable part of the world at least,) quickly fallen into the contempt and hatred, which they well deserve. But then, as it is natural for the warmth of men to carry them too far; and the thoughtlessness of men to confound matters, which should be

* James i. 26. † Acts xvii. 23.

glory, at his transfiguration *. *When they saw him,* the generality immediately *worshipped him: but some,* we are told with the usual fairness of the sacred writers, *doubted* †. Whether these were only persons, who accompanied the Apostles, and had not yet seen him since he rose again: or whether some of the Apostles, themselves, who might not with certainty know him at a distance, is not clear. But the doubts of either could not but vanish when *Jesus came up* to them, as St. Matthew assures us he did, for so the original word signifies ‡, and conversed familiarly with them. Many such conversations he held with these his followers: for St. Luke in their Acts informs us, that they continued *forty days* §. But the substance of them all must be, what the text expresses: where, in consequence of that fulness of *power,* which he tells them, in the foregoing words, was *given him* over all things *in heaven and in earth; as the Father had sent him, he sends them* ‖, to *make disciples,* for that is the more accurate rendering ¶, not of the Jews alone, but of *all nations.* And that they may do it rightly and effectually, he distinctly sets forth,

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themselves very little farther about it, than to oppose it, in their talk, to religion. Such indeed cannot be really, in any degree, serious. But many who, in some respects, are such, and imagine they are in all, would assuredly find, on a careful examination, that they are dangerously deficient in this respect: and that cultivating and exerting dutiful affection to the Author of their being, is not only in itself *the first and great Commandment*, but hath a most powerful influence on the practice of that *second*, which is *like unto it* *, and of every other human obligation.

II. We are bound to observe the precepts of revealed religion, as well as natural. That God can make known to us many truths, of which we were ignorant, though greatly interested in them, will not surely be doubted: for we can make known such very often one to another. And that from these truths corresponding rules of behaviour may flow, is equally plain. Those relations and duties therefore to our Redeemer and to our Sanctifier, which the Holy Scripture alone discovers to us, are not, on that account, at all the less real, than those to our Creator, of which reason informs us. Further: as God is the Sovereign of the world, there is no more room for question, whether under the general laws of his moral kingdom, he may not establish, from time to time, particular and different institutions and forms of religion; than whether, under the general laws of human society, earthly sovereigns may not establish particular and different institutions and forms of government. And lastly: As God knows perfectly well, both the nature of our circumstances, and the proper method of treating us; that he may possibly have very important motives for some of his appointments, of which

* Matth. xxii. 37, &c.

motives we can discern scarce any thing, is much more certain, than that a wise man, well acquainted with any affair, may perceive many steps to be fitting in relation to it, which a weak man, uninstructed in it, doth not.

Whatever precepts then are contained in revelation, since none of them, rightly understood, are contrary to reason, it is our indispensable duty to observe them, though ever so implicitly, *walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless* *. We know not what we do when we reject or slight any one of them: only this we know, that we disobey that authority which enjoins the whole: a consideration worthy of being laid seriously to heart by all those, (for too many there are,) who, either presumptuously, or thoughtlessly, neglect or depreciate some of the institutions of Christianity, while they profess to reverence others; and, as any shadow of argument or groundless imagination leads them, determine with themselves, that this they will do, that they will not; this they will look on as a matter of moment, that as a trifle. It cannot be, that any of the laws of Christ, our Lord and Master, are to be treated thus. And yet some of them are treated thus by such numbers, (who notwithstanding, call themselves by his name,) that they must be mentioned in particular.

The sacrament of baptism, the leading part of our Saviour's commission in the text, is not indeed thrown off, but frequently attended with scarce common seriousness. The obligation of parents and masters to *bring up* those under their care *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord* †, is both cruelly and unwisely forgotten. The apostolical and very useful ordinance of confirmation, is too often omitted, and still

* Luke i. 6. † Eph. vi. 4.

oftener considered as an empty form: private devotion practised, it may be feared by very few, at least with any attention: pious reading and meditation by fewer still: family prayer almost intirely laid aside: and the public service of God, by some avowedly scorned, by others, both thought and spoken of with a contemptuous indifference; as if it might well be left to fancy and chance, when and how often, or whether almost at all, they should condescend to join in that worship of him who made them, which himself hath prescribed. The day, which he hath directed to be kept holy, is lamentably, and in many places openly, profaned, not only by the omission just mentioned, but by needless worldly business, improper diversions, and what is yet worse, intemperance and debauchery. Nay, the far greater part, even of such as observe other institutions with no small appearance of conscientiousness, astonishingly overlook, in spite of continual admonitions, their Saviour's injunction of commemorating, at the holy table, his dying love, delivered nearly with his dying breath. Experience hath proved to a shocking degree, that in proportion as disregard to duties, peculiarly Christian, increases, disregard to all duty increases too: and what the end of it will be (unless through God's grace our timely reformation put a happy end to it) I know not how we can better judge, than by our blessed Lord's own words, which he hath verified so dreadfully on those once shining lights, the churches of Asia, to whom they were primarily directed. *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works: else I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent* *.

* Rev. ii. 5.

III. Being bound to whatever Christ hath commanded us, we are bound to perform the most laborious and unwelcome, as well as the easiest, of his commands. We may be sure, he hath enjoined us nothing, but what he will make possible, nothing but what he hath a right, nothing but what he hath cause, to enjoin. And therefore, the difficulty of his precepts can never be an excuse for not obeying them. Sometimes this difficulty is but imaginary: and what we apprehend that we cannot do at all, would we but try in a proper manner, we should do with great ease. Sometimes it is real indeed, but of our own creating. Slight inclinations have grown, by indulgence or negligence, into settled habits: wilful wrong conduct hath put obstacles in the way of acting right: and then we think it very grievous, that we must be at pains to bring ourselves out of a condition, that we need never have brought ourselves into. Or, supposing any virtue originally hard to practise, do we not often obey extremely hard injunctions of men? And why not therefore those of God? Be the labour ever so great; still, both in the nature of the thing, and by the appointment of Heaven, no one can become happy, that doth not become good: and no one is truly good, who purposely or negligently lives in the omission of any duty, or commission of any sin. Difficulty is a reason for nothing, but exerting ourselves, and applying to God for help: which whoever doth in earnest, will find opposition serve only to strengthen his Christian graces by exercise here, and augment the reward of them for ever hereafter.

IV. We must observe those commands, which relate to the government of ourselves, no less than those which respect our fellow-creatures. Men are

strangely apt to run into extremes in this particular. Some on the merit of their abstinence from unlawful pleasures, venture without scruple to be ill-humoured, hard-hearted, censorious, and unjust; while some again place the whole of a right character in a gay kind of good nature: and, either hurting, as they pretend, nobody but themselves; or, however doing others only such injuries, as they imagine matter of merriment; go almost whatever lengths of sensual gratification their desires prompt them to. Now these latter, far from being the harmless people, which they would have the world think them, usually contribute more by the unavoidable, and often foreseen, consequences of their vices, and the contagion of their examples, to bring misery into private life, and distress, if not ruin, upon the public, than almost any wicked persons that can be mentioned besides. But were they, in these respects, ever so innocent: yet our being rational creatures as indispensably binds us to sobriety, chastity, and decency, as our being social creatures doth to inoffensiveness and beneficence. A mind immersed in voluptuousness, nay filled with amusements and trifles, and attentive to them only or chiefly, is by no means in a moral state, and much less in a religious one: our evident capacity and formation for higher and better things, cannot but carry with it a proportionable obligation, to the improvement of our understandings in the knowledge of truth, and of our hearts in the esteem of virtue; to the care of acting worthily and usefully amongst our fellow-creatures, and qualifying ourselves for spiritual happiness with our Creator. Thus much even the light of nature will teach us. And if Revelation be consulted; there we shall find the strongest cautions, against that fondness for

sumptuous living, delicacy, and splendor, which brought the rich man into the place of torment*: against being *lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God*†. Scriptures, like these, are not designed to drive persons into unnatural rigours and austerities: but they are designed to restrain them from that habit and study of self-indulgence, which being attended perhaps with the commission of no flagrant sins, looks to be an allowable way of consuming time; but indeed brings poor wretches, often by quick degrees, to intire forgetfulness of God and themselves, and extinguishes all attention to what deserves it most. This lethargy of the mind is the great danger of a state of prosperity and affluence: which therefore, as many as are placed in that state should continually watch against, as being totally contrary to a spirit of religion; and remember, that whosoever so *liveth in pleasure,* as to live to it, *is dead while he liveth*‡: dead to all the purposes of Christianity here, and all the hopes of felicity hereafter.

V. Our Saviour's direction, that all nations be *taught to observe* every thing *which he hath commanded,* implies a prohibition of teaching any thing in his name, which he hath not commanded, either personally, while on earth, or by the holy spirit of truth after his ascension. For where his commission ends, there the powers of those, to whom he gave it, end also. Still, in matters left undetermined, or not fully determined by him, men of knowledge may signify their opinion, men of prudence may suggest their advice, and both are to be regarded in a proper degree. Superiors may likewise interpose their authority, so far as public order and peace require;

* Luke xvi. 19, &c. † 2 Tim. iii. 4. ‡ 1 Tim. v. 6.

and, in all things lawful, others are bound to submit to them. But no man, or number of men, may presume to set up their own judgment, or their own will, for a law of Christ: or add a single article, as a necessary one, to that rule of *faith* and practice, which was *once delivered unto the saints**. Even St. Paul himself hath on one occasion accurately distinguished between what he, and what the Lord in person, spoke†; between points in which he had express *commandment*, and points in which he *gave his judgment as one that had obtained mercy to be faithful*‡: that is, in the trust of the Apostleship. And if such a person was thus careful, much more ought the ministers of religion in these latter ages, who can have no certain acquaintance with it, but from his writings and the rest of Scripture, be solicitous not to *preach any other gospel, than that they have received*§; nor *build, on the foundation of Jesus Christ*, superstructures that will not abide the trial‖, *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*¶. They, who assume this power, usurp a dominion over their fellow-servants, to which only their Master in heaven hath a right: and they who obey this power, so far *worship God in vain, who hath never required this at their hands***.

I have now gone through the second part of the text: the duties, which the Apostles and their successors were to enjoin. And therefore I proceed to set before you,

III. The protection and happiness, of which both they who faithfully preach the gospel, and they who sincerely embrace it, may be assured. *Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

* Jude v. 3. † 1 Cor. vii. 10. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. vii. 25.
§ Gal. i. 9. ‖ 1 Cor. iii. 11, 12, 13. ¶ Matth. xv. 9.
** Is. i. 12.

Amongst men, choosing to be with any one is not only a natural consequence of having a regard for him, but on many important occasions a necessary means of showing that regard to his advantage. In condescension therefore to common language, God, though present every where, is described in holy writ as peculiarly drawing nigh unto, being, and dwelling with, those, who by a temper and conduct of piety and virtue intitle themselves to his love and fatherly care: whereas he is represented as departing from persons of a contrary character, not vouchsafing to look upon them, or beholding them afar off, till he returns to execute judgment on them. Of this kind is the manner of speech used in the text: where our blessed Lord, being about to leave the world, and go unto the Father, tells his followers, that though his visible and bodily presence was to be withdrawn very soon, he should be still as really present upon earth as ever: not only seeing, but watching, directing, and defending them continually. And therefore, notwithstanding St. Matthew thought fit to abstain from subjoining in his gospel any words of his own to these most solemn ones of our Saviour, yet his ascent into heaven is almost as well understood by them, as if it had been expressly related.

This gracious promise was doubtless immediately, and in the first place, made to the Apostles. But as the use, for which it was made, is perpetual; and the term for which it is expressed to be made, cannot possibly be confined to themselves; but must signify either, as we translate it, *to the end of the world*, or *to the end of the gospel age*, which is to last as long as the world: it must necessarily be extended to those, who should at any time succeed the Apostles in teaching the faith and duties of Christanity. And

since the presence of Christ with the teachers of his religion is designed for the benefit of those, who are taught it: therefore all such, in all ages, have a share in the assurance of the text. Accordingly, in many places of Scripture, the presence, not only of the Son of God, but of the Father, and Holy Spirit, is promised to every true believer without exception. St. Paul declares, *If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his* *. And Christ himself declares, *if a man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him* †.

If then, as the church of Rome pretends, such expressions as these convey a promise of infallibility, or security of not departing from the right faith, to their church, or any person or persons in it; they convey the same to every church, and every person in it. But our Saviour's declaration is, not that any one or more churches may not, if they will, intirely throw off the faith; and even all churches, as well as all men, fall both into many errors and many sins; but that this shall never happen through his forsaking them, but their forsaking him: and that, how great soever the apostacy of the latter times may be, (as St. Paul hath foretold it should be a very grievous one‡;) how much soever at any time the church of Christ may be obscured, it shall never be extinguished: for it must continue to the end of the world, since he hath promised to *be with it* to the end of the world. In different ages he is present to it in different manners, as the circumstances of each require. His Apostles he directed by inspiration into all truth: and strengthened them with power to work miracles in confirmation of it. When reli-

* Rom. viii. 9. † John xiv. 23. ‡ Tim. iv. 1.

gion, by their means, was known and proved sufficiently, these extraordinary effects of his presence gradually ceased: but those, which remained still needful, were still experienced. And to this day, wherever his ministers teach men to believe and do what he hath commanded, there *he is alway with them:* and *wherever two or three* of his Disciples *are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them**: protecting his whole church, and every member of it, outwardly against their temporal enemies to such degree, as infinite wisdom sees to be fit; and inwardly against their spiritual ones, so that nothing, but their own wilful sins and perseverance in them, shall hazard the salvation of any one of them. But so far as men allow themselves to teach, believe, or practise, contrary to his commands, they forfeit their title to his gracious presence, which evidently depends on their obedience to those commands. And consequently no set of men in the world have a right to argue, as the Romanists would fain do; that Christ hath promised to be with his church for ever; and therefore their church, or the majority of the whole church, can teach only what he appointed they should. But ours is a very just way of arguing; that we teach what Christ pointed we should, and therefore we are a part of his church, with which he hath promised to be for ever. For that our doctrines are Catholic, however the Romanists have stolen the name, we are bold to say, and fully able to prove: on this account we have nothing to fear. Could we but say as much of our lives too, then all were well.

But alas, though they have little cause on comparison to reproach us in this respect, we have much

* Matth. xviii. 20.

cause to reproach ourselves. The number of professed Christians amongst us indeed is large: yet even that is lessening. But the number of such as are truly Christians, and behave like Christians—What shall we say of this? May God, *who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,* cause the light of his gospel to *shine* more effectually *into the hearts of men**, and brighten the very dark prospect there is before us concerning spiritual matters; that we may *know, at least in this our day, the things which belong to our peace*†, our present and future happiness. But what others will do, is for them to consider; and what shall be the consequences of men's doings, is for God to appoint. Let us only look to our own souls: that in the midst of a bad world we be, as we ought, innocent, prudent, and exemplary; that we watch over those who are under our care, and warn others as we have opportunity; that, by openly professing the gospel of Christ, we encourage the profession of it; and, by adorning our profession with a suitable conduct, do honour to it. Provided we behave thus; let others behave as they please, and the event be what it will to them, and to all, in temporal concerns; to us the final event however shall be good. Christianity began with a very small number; and were it to be reduced to an equally small one again, we might take the same comfort still, which our Saviour gave his disciples at first; *Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*‡. *The kingdoms of this earth* we have cause to hope will yet, in due time, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, *become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his*

* 2 Cor. iv. 6. † Luke xix. 42. ‡ Luke xii. 32.

*Christ**, in a much ampler manner than they have hitherto been. But the kingdom of Heaven, *God, who cannot lie*†, hath, in the plainest terms, promised to the faithful disciples of his Son. And all who have secured his presence with them here, by a life of religion and virtue, shall assuredly reign with him for ever hereafter in those blessed *mansions of his Father's house,* whither *he is gone to prepare a place for us, and will come again, and receive us unto himself, that where he is, there we may be also*‡.

* Rev. xi. 15. † Tit. i. 2. ‡ John xiv. 2, 3.

SERMON III.

EPHESIANS IV. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

THE nature of Almighty God being absolutely perfect and uncompounded, neither passions nor affections, properly so called, have any place in it: but his actions all proceed from uniform and unmixed regard to truth and equity. His creatures, incapable of attaining to be in any respect what he is, fall short of it in different degrees, from those spirits above, that approach nearest to pure intelligence, though infinitely distant from it, to the lowest inhabitants of earth, which have no other guide than appetites and instincts. Man is of a middle rank; and partakes, almost equally, of inferior principles to excite and move him, where reason would be insufficient, and of reason to direct and restrain these, where else they would take a wrong course, or exceed proper bounds. Our proportion therefore of lower faculties, though a proof that we are very imperfect, contributes to our being on the whole less so, than we should have been; and a due regulation of them by the higher, will make us continually more perfect than we are. This is the great employment allotted us by our Maker here on earth: which indeed we often find much pain in attempting, but should suffer much greater by neglecting, and shall be rewarded eternally for performing.

Now, according to the several kinds of our inward dispositions, the moral discipline of them varies. Some, as the benevolent sort, require chiefly to be strengthened: some again, as the irascible, to be kept in subjection. And indeed our anger is so hard to be governed, and the cause of such dreadful evils, when it is not governed; that no wonder, if great and wise men have seemed to speak of it, as totally and essentially vicious: as requiring to be, not only moderated but rooted out. Yet, as those parts of the outward frame of nature, which have produced at any time the most frightful effects, appear notwithstanding, on due inquiry, beneficial constituents of that whole, which the Creator originally pronounced to be good: let us not condemn, without reserve, this part of our inward frame; which he hath planted in our breasts, otherwise it had never existed there; and which, in condescension to our understandings, he hath ascribed to himself.

Resentment is, in its primitive nature, a just and generous movement of the mind, expressing that displeasure against ill actions, which they deserve: and, in our hearts at least, such disapprobation of what is wrong seems inseparably connected with approving what is right. From this principle, applied to ourselves, we feel a scorn of baseness and vice, that prompts us to reject it with disdain, when we are tempted to it: or a consequent self-dislike, if we have fallen under the temptation, which doth not easily allow us any rest, till we have returned to our duty. The same principle pointed towards our fellow-creatures deters them from enterprising wickedness, and invigorates us to resist it: or, if it be already committed, stirs us up to set before them the offensiveness of their conduct in so strong a light, as may

induce them to reform it. And thus anger, though it designs to give uneasiness, is so very different from hatred, as to be often the best proof of love. But when just indignation cannot amend the faulty, then it comes in properly to punish them: to counterbalance that excessive tenderness, to which, however amiable, it would in some cases be a fatal weakness to yield, and support us in the painful work of *executing wrath on him that doth evil**.

Thus useful and important is this passion: by which our Saviour himself was occasionally moved, as when he *was much displeased* with his Disciples†, and *looked round about on the Jews with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts*‡. He hath declared indeed, *that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment*§: but that very limitation implies, that there are causes, for which we may *do well to be angry*‖. Or even were his threatening originally unlimited, as in some copies it is; yet the reason of the case, his own example, and other texts of Scripture, oblige us to understand him only of the unjust kinds of anger: which are so much commoner than the allowable, that they have almost appropriated the name, and turned it to an ill meaning. Whence perhaps it is, that the Stoic Philosophers condemn this passion in the most general terms¶ while yet they not only allow it to be useful to those, in whom rea-

* Rom. xiii. 4. † Mark x. 14. ‡ Mark iii. 5.
§ Matth. v. 22. ‖ Jonah iv. 9.

¶ Thus Cicero, who professes in his Offices, l. 1. c. 2. chiefly to follow the Stoics, blames the Peripatetics, c. 25, for praising anger, as given us by nature for our good, and saith it is to be avoided in all cases. But he is speaking only concerning cases of punishment. However he forbids it also in reproofs, c. 38.

son singly hath not sufficient force*, but expressly tolerate, in their ideal perfectly wise man, such gentler commotions of mind, and resemblances of anger, as are in reality moderate degrees of it†. And, (which deserves much greater attention), St. Paul, who within a few verses of the text hath commanded *all wrath and anger to be put away from*‡ Christians, gives, nothwithstanding, the permissive direction in it, *Be ye angry and sin not.*

The result then must be, that this passion is indeed a lawful one; but very necessary, and very hard, to be kept within due bounds; which considerations recommend the following method in discoursing upon it.

I. To describe the due bounds, with the common excesses, of anger.

II. To dissuade from such excesses.

III. To direct how they may be avoided.

I. To describe the due bounds, with the common excesses, of anger.

Now the proper bound for all passion, is reason. And we are then only moved by our affections as we ought, when they excite us to what our understandings on reflection approve. But because a rule so general is not sufficiently instructive, I shall enlarge on the several particulars comprehended under it, which are specified by the Philosopher, in his Ethics, thus, that *he, who is angry, only on such occasions as he ought, and with such persons as he ought, and in such manner, and at such time, and for such continuance, as he ought, deserves praise in the exercise of this passion*§.

* Utile est eum uti motu animi, qui uti ratione non potest, Cic. Tusc. Disp. l. 4. § 25. Ed. Davies.

† Sentiet [sapiens] levem quendam tenuemque motum—umbras affectuum. Sen. de Ira. l. 1. c. xvi. p. 13. Ed. Lips. Vid. et. l. 2.

‡ V. 31. § Aristot. Eth. Nicom. l. iv. c. 5.

1. On such occasions as he ought. What these are, hath already in some measure appeared. Were they, with whom we have to do, constantly virtuous and wise, there would be no occasion. But now their transgressions against God, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves, furnish, alas, but too many. When our Maker, whom we ought to reverence and love with our whole souls, is dishonoured: when his laws and the sanctions of them (the ground-work of all security and all comfort) are insulted; surely it is cause not only of grief, but indignation. When the helpless are oppressed, the well-meaning circumvented; innocence aspersed or seduced, faith broken, kindness requited with ill usage, or public good sacrificed to private views, we both may, and must (if we have any sympathy with our kind) feel our spirit rise in their behalf. And though we can neither interpose to assist all that suffer, nor permit our tempers to be ruffled as often as injustice is committed upon earth; yet in all proper ways we ought to shew, that we strongly dislike all such things: and it is an ill sign, when persons are indifferent in the cases of others, and will stand up for no one's interests, but their own.

Wrongs done to ourselves we are all so apt to resent, at least enough, that it may seem needless, and even dangerous, to say any thing of these, as one lawful occasion for anger. But the truth must be acknowledged, that this passion being given us, in a great measure, for our own defence, we may innocently exert a competent degree of it for that purpose. Nor can we help, generally speaking, being a little more moved at our own injuries and sufferings, than those of others; because we cannot but have a livelier sense of them; and the emotion of mind, which

proceeds from that sense, must bear some proportion to it.

One thing more to be observed is, that though faults are the only just ground of resentment; and the greater they are, the more the ground: yet, when they do not amount to crimes, but are only neglects or transgressions of some smaller obligation: still, since a great deal of inconvenience in life arises, even from these instances of wrong behaviour; they warrant and require such lower marks of our displeasure, especially when the culpable are placed under our inspection, as may be requisite for their amendment.

And now it might well be hoped, that a sufficient latitude was given to this necessary evil, the exercise of anger. But these are narrow bounds for a passion, which, if let loose, will admit of none. We can be angry with persons, not only for their faults, but their good qualities and accomplishments, when they excel, or come too near, us or our favourites: not only for doing amiss, but for doing their duty, if it interfere with any of our designs or humours. Nay, we can be angry with them for having done their duty to us; done the kindest thing they could for us, reminded us of our failings, though in a friendly way; or shewn themselves in any instance more concerned for us, than we are for ourselves. We can be angry with persons, even when they have done us kindnesses; for not doing us such great ones, or not so soon, or not in such a manner, as we would have had them: though perhaps they were not bound to do us any. And we can be extremely angry with them for having any degree of regard to their own interests, when ours are concerned: first looking upon ourselves as all the world, and the rest of mankind as nothing; then fired with the utmost indignation, that this *should* be disputed.

But in lesser matters, we can be angry with men even for their natural tempers, when they happen to be more gravely, or more cheerfully, or any way differently, turned from our own: for their not liking the same employments or amusements, their not falling into the same opinions and ways of thinking; sometimes on the most trifling subjects; nay, for not perceiving and acknowledging immediately the strength of an argument, or the weight of an authority.

Again, we can be angry for the unkind words or actions, to which we ourselves have given the provocation: and will make no allowances for little unreasonablenesses in others, where we have, perhaps by great ones, set the pattern, and thrown the temptation in their way. We can be angry at those who are employed by us, for mistaking or not succeeding in cases, where they have done as well as ever they could, and certainly did not contrive to be ignorant or fail on purpose to vex us. We can be angry at them for mere accidental misfortunes in our affairs: things, which were not provided against, because they were not to be expected; or which a reasonable degree of care proved insufficient to provide against; or, it may be, which all the care in the world could not have prevented. Nay, in our idlest diversions, we can be as vehemently discomposed, as about the most important business. And in the general course of our behaviour, we can be impatient about every thing, if we have been made uneasy about any thing: and quite out of humour, perhaps for a considerable time together, without either having, or almost thinking we have, any manner of provocation to it. Indeed something of this, in too many, seems constitutional: and, so far as it is, ought to have allowances made for it by every one, except those who

are liable to it. But they themselves cannot reflect too seriously, how often and how much they make all about them suffer for no cause at all: and those most, whom they ought least: how strangely and wildly unreasonable they are, when under the power of this bad spirit: and how firmly they are obliged to watch against it continually, and free themselves, when seized by it, as soon as possibly they can.

In all these instances, anger is so evidently unjust, that happily no pretence can be made for indulging it. But there are others, in which, faults having been really committed, a plea for resenting is really furnished; and yet, if we resolve to act rightly and wisely, no resentment at all must be shewn or entertained. We have not been received perhaps with the good breeding, or treated with the regard or good humour, that we might expect: expressions, not so prudent or obliging, have dropt from persons in relation to us: things, in which we meant no harm, have been taken wrong: our desires and inclinations have not been consulted, when they ought: our opinion or recommendation hath been too little attended to: our advice or directions too little observed: or some one or another of a thousand matters of this sort, hath happened. And doubtless every one of them, supposing the fact to have been as we imagine, is a fault: and, though of a slighter sort, should be carefully avoided by those, with whom we live; and let me add, by ourselves too. But, alas, they with whom we live, and we ourselves too, are creatures, naturally subject to such faults. Indiscretions and thoughtlessness, odd humours and perverseness, little partialities and prejudices, ever were and will be amongst men, even the better kind of men. And therefore what can be done? Either we must all give

and take offence almost every hour of our lives; or we must be content to make mutual allowances, and put good constructions on things: wink at what had better not be seen; forget as soon as possible, what we could not help seeing; and teach those by our example, who, we think have need to learn, friendly dispositions, and respectful behaviour. This is the only way of mending matters: and shameful as it is to our species, half the uneasinesses that we feel in life, proceed from our not taking it.

2. The next part of the rule before mentioned is, that we be angry only with such persons as we ought.

And here immediately occurs a criminal use of this passion, almost too shocking to mention: I mean, when we are angry with our Maker. For against whom else is it, that our displeasure is pointed, when we murmur at the distribution of things here, either because our own condition is less agreeable than we would have it, or that of others more prosperous, than we imagine they deserve? The former is direct rebellion of the heart against the dispositions of infinite wisdom and goodness: an arrogance, which in creatures otherwise innocent would be monstrous; and how much more so in miserable sinners! The latter indeed would appear a virtuous concern at the encouragement, which frequent success gives to wickedness and unworthiness. Nor can it be doubted, but we have cause, often to be sorry, and sometimes to be angry, with those around us, when this happens through their fault. And yet indulging either of these dispositions too far, will reduce us to a very uncomfortable and very blameable state of mind. But to be provoked, that God suffers men to act thus, is claiming to govern the world in his stead: whose abhorrence of sin, and of disproportion, we ought to

consider, is infinitely greater than ours can be: and therefore if, for good and wise reasons he thinks fit to bear with it, well may we do so too: and wait with patience for the appointed time, when, every seeming irregularity shall appear to have joined in producing the most beautiful order. *Fret not thyself because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the evil-doers. Leave off from wrath, and let go displeasure: else shalt thou be moved to do evil. Hold thee still in the Lord, and abide patiently upon him**. *For surely there is an end, and thine expectation shall not be cut off*†.

But as anger against our Maker is impious, against some of our fellow-creatures also it is highly improper: those particularly, under whose authority we are: and all, in some measure, whose rank is higher than our own. Of them, beyond others, we ought not without strong reasons even to think ill, much less to blame them openly, and least of all to their faces. But if some extraordinary occasion should happen to require it, their station absolutely demands, that we suppress much of that roughness of manner, and familiar warmth of expostulation, which perhaps towards equals might not be unfit. For he, who is angry and finds fault, assumes a kind of superiority for the time: which inferiors ought rarely to do, and with great moderation, if at all: though doubtless in gentler terms, they may freely represent whatever concerns them.

Another sort of persons, exempted from all heat of resentment, and therefore certainly of reproof, are our benefactors and our friends. Where we have received favours, it would be very hard to let a few unkindnesses, because they came last, blot out every

* Psalm xxxvii. 1. 7, 8. † Prov. xxiii. 18.

thing that went before; and move us to speak or think with the same severity, as we would of others. Nothing, but gross and repeated provocations, ought to have this effect. And we should be extremely backward to imagine, that they, whom we have seen taking pleasure to do us good, design us any harm. Then as to our friends: the esteem, which we have entertained for them, surely must be founded on merit sufficient to shelter a number of lesser faults from angry notice. Friendship implies a tacit covenant of mutual forbearance, without which it would be in danger of breaking every day. It permits indeed, and sometimes requires, remonstrances to be made: but never without some weighty cause; and always with such gentleness, and evident proofs of cordial good-will, as may, if possible, draw closer those bonds, which nothing but the last necessity should untie. And even then, having once been friends is a powerful reason, both of prudence and conscience, to restrain us from ever becoming enemies.

Others are privileged against our anger upon any particular misbehaviour, by the general goodness of their character and conduct. We are all so far from perfection, that whoever intends, and acts right in the main, merits an esteem for it, that should cover a multitude of smaller offences, or however greatly moderate our displeasure at them. And indeed, shewing worthy persons, in the mildest way, that they have done amiss, will give them a concern, that needs no aggravation.

But many, who are more liable to faults, must yet, on account of their natural dispositions, be tenderly used. Some cannot support any harshness of treatment, but sink under it immediately. Some again,

anger, though not excessive, serves only to exasperate. They will readily enough yield to calm, soft representations: but are impatient of rebuke. To such therefore we should condescend a little: and think it sufficient amends, that we are almost sure of prevailing on them by such means, as (if we have any good nature,) will be far the most agreeable to ourselves. But there are likewise, it must be owned, people in the world, whom it is easy to make worse by rough usage, and not easy to make better by any other. That these deserve to have their tempers much consulted, cannot be said. But still, partly from charity and partly from discretion, we must treat them in the method, by which they are likeliest to prove tractable: and, resolving first, to have as little to do with them as we can; endeavour to get over what we must have to do with them, as quietly as we are able.

There is also a great variety not only in tempers, but in understandings and abilities, which ought to be considered on this occasion. We pass by many faults in children without anger, if we are at all considerate: because they know not, as yet, the rules of behaviour; or, through the levity, incident to their age, are turned aside from recollecting them. Now, for the same reason, such of riper years, as either by nature have less readiness, or accuracy, or sedateness; or, from their education less acquaintance with propriety, or the customs of the world, should in proportion be exempted from blame, when they misbehave; especially in small points, and such as are beyond their reach, or out of their way. Besides, men cannot be always attentive to every part of what they do know. And some have constitutionally so uncommon a share of thoughtlessness, that, with the

same, nay, much more desire and pains, than others, to be exact and punctual, they appear to be singularly negligent. These evidently need compassion; and severity to them would be barbarous. Now and then indeed a little chiding may be necessary for the cure of their infirmity; but it ought never to be more than is necessary, and always intermixed with expressions of encouragement.

Thus you have seen, who are the least fit objects of our displeasure: after which it will be useful to specify, who are the most fit; and may allowably have much greater liberties taken with them by us, than commonly are. I mean ourselves: of whom we probably know full as great misdemeanors, and from whom we have certainly received much greater injuries, than from any one else; over whom also we have the largest authority, and are the most indispensably bound to exercise it. Yet even here it is possible to be guilty of excess. For anger must aim at good, when directed against ourselves, no less than if it were against any other person: and is always faulty, when it tends to our harm; even were it no further harm, than discomposing us beyond reason. And some want to be cautioned in the strongest manner, at times, to beware of immoderate self-dislike, because it may urge them to the rashest and most fatal extremities. But self-indulgence is infinitely the commoner failing: and therefore the general rule must ever be to preach up due rigour in this case; for due tenderness will seldom be forgotten. Here then we may well employ that superfluous warmth of spirit, which we are apt to turn quite another way; and shall never employ it better, than to correct its own exorbitances: that, so spending our displeasure upon our own unjust vehemence,

we may *put on* towards all our brethren, (and every human creature is such,) *bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,—even as Christ hath forgiven us:—and let the peace of God rule in our hearts, to the which we are also called in one body* *.

* Col. iii. 12, 13. 15.

SERMON IV.

EPHESIANS IV. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

In a former discourse on these words, after proving, that anger is a lawful passion, but a very dangerous one, I proposed,

I. To describe its due bounds, with the common excesses of it.

II. To dissuade from such excesses.

III. To direct how they may be avoided.

Now in general the bounds of every passion are those, which reason, sufficiently enlightened, prescribes. And the particular bounds, which it prescribes to this passion, are, as I have already observed, well enumerated in the philosopher's rule: that *he who is angry, only on such occasions, and with such persons, and in such manner, and at such time, and for such continuance, as he ought, deserves praise in the exercise of this faculty.* On the two first of these heads therefore, the occasions and objects of our anger, I have already enlarged: and as the proper ones will be almost sure to be remembered, and the improper ones are much too many to be specified again, I shall proceed, without any repetition of either, to the following part of the rule, which is

III. That we be angry only in such manner as we ought. This comprehends both the degree, to which our displeasure may allowably rise, and the instances in which it may be fitly expressed.

There is a possibility of being less angry than we should. Our sense of wrong actions may be too faint: and by taking, in consequence of this, but a slight notice of them, we may confirm the faulty in a bad course, instead of deterring them from it. And especially, when their faults do us no harm, whatever they may do to others or themselves, we are often very backward either to express or feel any resentment, even where it is our peculiar duty. But if, while they injure others, they serve us; far from being displeased we are very apt to defend and encourage them. Yet there are some in the world, whom a generous ardor of mind occasionally discomposes too much, on seeing injustice done to their fellow-creatures. But these are rare. It is in our own cases usually, that we are inclined to excess: and in them our danger is very great. To avoid it therefore, we should, all of us, frequently reflect, that our passions being only given us for auxiliaries, to supply the imperfection of our higher principles; if they move us enough to set us upon acting right, it suffices: and if they move us more than is requisite for that end, it will commonly be too much. Where we properly can, the very appearance of displeasure should be avoided: for, though it be a method of cure, yet being a disagreeable one, if we have recourse to it without need, we treat our patient ill. And, even where we must shew ourselves offended, this may very well be done, indeed best of all, without allowing ourselves to be inwardly disturbed. For thus at the same time that we preserve a due authority over those, with whom we are concerned, we shall keep our own temper in a state of tranquillity, and fit for whatever lies before us. In matters of moment it is not always in our power to be absolutely calm;

but this consideration should increase our care not to be agitated too much. For he, who is angry more than he hath cause, is so far *angry without a cause*. And therefore we must have regard, both to the proportion of the fault, and our right to take notice of it. For a person may deserve a great deal of anger, and yet deserve little or none from us.

Exact determinations indeed of this proportion are hard to give: and probably would do harm if they could easily be given. For, were the limits of lawful anger in every case precisely known, most people would venture without scruple to the utmost extent of them; and so of course be hurried beyond them; whereas the difficulty of discerning exactly where the transgression begins, is a strong caution to stop at a safe distance from it. But instead of thinking thus, we commonly conclude, that since anger may justly rise according to the provocation, and much of it is daily shewn about small things, any degree whatever is defensible in great ones. Now evidently this reasoning ought to be inverted as follows: only a moderate resentment being permitted us, where the offence is ever so heinous, hardly the slightest ought to be expressed, where it is but little.

And though we cannot ascertain minutely the due quantity in each; the observation of two rules will secure us from any important error: never to lose the government of ourselves, or do an injury to any one else. The first of these directions is fundamental. For if once reason be dethroned, rules and bounds are nothing. And though it be a dreadful evil to let any passion seduce us from obeying that principle, which God hath authorized to regulate our whole conduct, yet it is peculiarly dangerous to follow this blindfold; which precipitates men instantaneously, and without

leaving room for a moment's reflection, into the extremities of mischief to others and themselves; and even where it is not hurtful, is however singularly disagreeable and unbecoming. We must therefore attentively remember, that, though displeasure may be allowable, rage cannot: and accordingly forbear, not only all acts of violence or insult, but all vehement gestures, all noisy and unreasonable talk, and above the rest that shocking, though common method of venting fury, by oaths and imprecations: invoking the notice of God in a condition when we ought to dread it; and bringing down that wrath on our own heads, which we vainly and wickedly call for upon others.

But avoiding these extravagances is not all: is nothing indeed, if, under a calmer appearance, we permit our resentment to go undue lengths. It is true, anger can be useful to others only by giving them uneasiness: but often a plain and grave signification, that we dislike their behaviour, will give it sufficiently: and then to add cutting, though guarded, words is cruel. Sometimes the same person, having both blameable and valuable qualities, nay exerting both together, may deserve that reproof should be tempered with praise. And where but little forbearance hath been merited, prudence frequently requires much to be exercised: because it may soften and win over those, whom roughness would drive to desperation.

And, if we ought thus to moderate the just expressions of our displeasure: much more ought unjust ones to be utterly forborn. We must by no means think, that every trifling, or perhaps imaginary, provocation gives us a liberty, which the very greatest do not, of betraying secrets, throwing random asper-

sions, and saying in the peevish fit whatever it suggests. Men do not lose all the rights of human nature immediately, because they have chanced to offend us. Their fault in doing so may be considerable, or may be small: but this one crime cannot transform them into quite different creatures from what they were before: it can never intitle us to speak falsehoods of them: and very seldom to say prejudicial truths. Injurious words may seem a slight matter to those who utter them; especially if they are such, as the world calls decent: but the person, to whom they relate, experiences them to be heavy and bitter things: and what his feelings must be, is the point, that we should have in view, reflecting what our own would be in the like case.

However the guilt of anger is yet more aggravated, when it misguides our actions, as well as our tongues. If it prompts us only to withhold from others, without cause, those kindnesses and favors, to which they had some equitable claim, or which, though they had not, we had hitherto shewn them, or intended for them; this alone is very hard and wrong usage. Indeed who almost could be secure even of a day's continuance of friendship, if every thing, which it were possible to take amiss, might put an end to it? But, if wrath push us on to do harm instead of good, then it hath arrived at its height of injustice. Not but we may lawfully in some cases inflict punishment on those, who have given us offence. But then anger is not to be the prosecutor: much less to pass or execute the sentence. It is not so often, as we are justly displeased with any one, that he is to suffer: but then only, when a valuable purpose requires it. Now we are by no means qualified to determine that point, while our inward disturbance is vehement: nor should

we ever allow ourselves to act, before we are cool enough to judge: nor are we always cool enough, when we think we are. And therefore we should learn to suspect our tempers, have regard to the opinion of the unprejudiced, and lean to the moderate side, when there is any doubt which is right. It will comparatively seldom happen, that excess of mildness will do any great mischief: but the contrary extreme causes an incredible deal perpetually. Every day we see those who are possessed by this evil spirit, return monstrous acts of injustice for slight instances of neglect or unfriendliness; imagine their displeasure, whencesoever it arises, a justification for stirring up all the world against the object of it; and look upon themselves as ill used, if every one else will not be as unreasonable as they are.

But I go on to the next branch of the rule, which is,

IV. That we be angry only at such times, as we ought.

And therefore it immediately occurs, never till we are sure, that the thing, which offends us, is really done, and really a matter to take offence at. *Blame not, before thou hast examined the truth: understand first, and then rebuke* *. Some are eternally suspecting, and finding fault at all adventures: as if they felt a delight in the imagination of things being amiss. These, even when there happens to be foundation for their censures, are in the wrong notwithstanding; for it is more than they knew beforehand: but, when it proves, as it often will, that all their ill humour was groundless; this is very shameful to themselves, and very injurious to others; hardens them, instead of having any good effect upon them; and brings them at last to think it the better way, since they must be

* Ecclus. xi. 7.

blamed, to be blamed for something. But suppose there be an appearance of reason to chide: yet appearances are deceitful; and passion spreads a mist before our understandings, which keeps us from seeing any thing exactly, and makes every thing look bigger than it is. No one therefore should express, or even inwardly indulge, the least warmth, till he hath first considered the case, as calmly as he can; and then, if there be room for it, hath given the parties, whom he suspects, liberty and time to make their defence; attending to it with a sincere desire of finding them innocent; making no determination, till he hath searched the matter fully; and being, in obedience to St. James's direction, *swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath**. The passionate person is just the reverse of this: impatient of all attempts to set him right; resolute to have that true, which he hath once imagined; eager to pass and execute immediate judgment. It may therefore be of the utmost consequence to get, though it were only a little space, for cool reflection. There is very small danger, but that even after it we shall be angry enough, if we have cause: and there is great danger, that without it we may be angry, though we have no cause; or at least much more angry, than we have any shadow of cause.

But admitting it to be seasonable for us to conceive the indignation, that we do: yet several things may render the present time improper to vent it. We may be likely just then to exceed due bounds: at least it may discompose us too much: and perhaps unfit us for duties or employments, to which we are immediately called: it may give uneasiness, or shew disrespect, to the company we are in, whom we

* James i. 19.

should never unnecessarily trouble with our vexations: or it may have a wrong effect on the object of our displeasure. If he be under the more than ordinary influence of some vehement passion, or his reason be any other way disturbed or clouded; if some prejudice, which cannot be removed instantly, makes him deaf in the mean while to all, that we can say; if his temper be not now serious enough to mind reproof, or the circumstances of time or place or company be such, that he will resent it as an indignity: *the discretion of a man should defer his anger**, how eager soever it may be to burst forth. But we are still more firmly bound to restrain ourselves, when the faulty have suffered by their faults, and want consolation instead of rebuke. Resentment was planted in us to discourage or withstand the injurious, not to insult the miserable: to give people a lively sense of their misbehaviour; not to triumph over them, when they have that sense already; perhaps more of it, than they can well bear. Or, though they feel their folly but imperfectly; yet if the consequences of it be heavy upon them; either casting them off, or severely reproaching them, at such times, is very ungenerous: and kind forbearance, one would imagine, cannot fail to make the good impressions on them, that we wish. If indeed they still remain void of reflection on their conduct, and it be our province to awaken them, we must attempt it; but as gently, as the case will permit; and perhaps, not till having done whatever we properly can towards relieving their distresses, we thus acquire an indisputable right of laying before them, with some warmth of expostulation, their past errors, in order to prevent the future.

* Prov. xix. 11.

The concluding part of the rule under consideration is,

V. That we be angry only so long as we ought.

It is possible indeed, though very uncommon, that men may lay aside their displeasure, at least the appearance of it, too soon; before it hath produced its intended effect: and, giving more credit, than they have cause, to a few fair promises, take little notice, how they are performed. Thus every one around them finds out the way of dealing with them: and perceiving, on how easy terms all may be made up, transgresses without fear. Sometimes the very same person is in the first moments much too violent, and afterwards, possibly from a consciousness of that, as much too remiss: and so is blameable and despised on both accounts. But the opposite extreme is the ordinary one: and generally the worst sin, that accompanies this passion. Some excess of sudden anger is to many a frailty scarce avoidable. For it is exceedingly difficult to escape being carried a little too far by an emotion of mind, which seems to be only zeal for what is right, and allows such short warning to be on our guard. If indeed we let one thing or another be provoking us almost perpetually, we must not think it a great alleviation, that our peevishness doth not dwell on any single point long, but quickly provides itself a fresh object. Or if we fly out at once into such extravagances, as to do in a little time almost as much mischief, as we could in a great deal: it is a poor plea to make in our own favour, that when we have satiated our fury, or worn down our spirits with it, we are calm again.

But if undue hastiness neither returns frequently, nor goes outrageous lengths; though always a transgression, yet it is in some measure an excusable one;

whereas the aggravations of rooted lasting bitterness are most heinous. For when there hath been space for warmth to cool, for reason to resume its dominion, for religion to soften men into a spirit of forgiveness, for friends to interpose their advice and persuasions, for every motive to exert itself; still to continue implacable, and deliberately to fortify ourselves in the wrong, is confirmed wickedness. And yet men indulge it strangely: and if nothing chances in a very little while to appease their first rage, allow it to settle into a habit of ill-will: which giving them less impetuous agitations, than they felt at first, they fancy themselves to have sufficiently recovered their temper, and proceed in their guilt without suspecting it. We should therefore be conscientiously watchful over our hearts in this particular. And readiest of all we should be to lay aside that displeasure, which we ought never to have entertained: and be friends again immediately, when it is our own fault, that we ever were otherwise. Yet, I fear, many cherish unreasonable resentment, because they secretly feel it is unreasonable, and never forgive those, whom they have once injured. They have run into a difficulty, out of which they cannot extricate themselves to their liking: and therefore will persist for ever in acting amiss, rather than own, that they have acted so at all. Now, it must be granted, their situation is a very mortifying one. Anger implies a charge upon another of misbehaviour. And when this charge hath been brought and urged, perhaps in very strong terms; to retract it, and make submissions instead of receiving them, must doubtless be a task highly disagreeable: which is an excellent reason for avoiding causeless wrath; but it is no reason for persevering in it. Solomon's counsel is very wise: *Go not forth*

*hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame**. But if we are got into such a condition, the speediest retreat is the best. Good people will moderate our shame, by accepting our first advances towards a confession, that we have erred. And if others require fuller satisfaction, we must give it them: for it would be monstrous to do them yet more wrong, because we have done them some already.

But nearest in guilt to the anger, which was originally causeless, is that which becomes so by lasting beyond its cause. Many things furnish just ground of animadversion; so just, that we should be to blame, if we omitted it: and yet are of so slight a nature, that we should be more to blame, if we did not, after duly signifying our dislike of them, return immediately to our former disposition and behaviour, even towards the person concerned. For there would be no living in any comfort, if every little offence were to be lengthened out, and the most made of it that can. Therefore in such cases, far from *letting the sun go down upon our wrath*†, we should not let the next hour, sometimes the next moment, see the least marks of it. Where there is need, they may continue longer: and be increased or lessened, according to the occasion. The tokens of our displeasure may be suspended for a time, and gentler methods tried: which are always the best, when they are likely to be effectual; then resumed, if circumstances demand it. But as soon as ever the fault is reformed, though not perfectly, yet as far as we can fairly expect, after all allowances made, (and in most cases a great many should be made) then without de-

* Prov. xxv. 8. † Eph. iv. 26.

lay we should declare ourselves reconciled, for we cannot any longer *be angry and not sin.*

One principal discouragement of such reformation is, that we commonly require of persons, besides the assurance of giving no affence for the future, great submissions for what is past. And they should always think it their duty to make them: but we should for the most part think it ours not to insist on them. Indeed their chief objection against acknowledging their misdemeanour, frequently is, that they imagine it will be in vain. And were they but undeceived by any little intimations of our disposition to forgive, they would repay us fully afterwards for that goodness, to which they would gladly have applied before, if despair had not withheld them. Or if they cannot even thus be brought to own themselves culpable in so many words: yet perhaps they will do it, readily and sufficiently, in a less direct manner. And the truth is, that some sorts of acknowledgments may be unsuitable to some sorts of persons on some occasions. But if any one should by mistake apprehend it beneath him to comply with what in strictness he is bound to: yet, provided he shews but any way, that he is conscious of his error, and purposes to avoid it for the future, both charity and humanity forbid rigorous demands of more. Nay, though even such tacit confessions and promises may be somewhat imperfect and ambiguous, favourable and liberal constructions ought to be put upon them; for we should ever encourage persons to amend by facilitating the means of it, to the best of our power. Much more then is it incumbent on us to banish resentment intirely, when all the satisfaction hath been offered us, that can be made, though perhaps a full compensa-

tion can never be made. For it is not the damage, but the injury done us, that justifies our anger. And therefore, when the injury is removed by repentance, though the damage continue, the anger ought to cease: because the offender being now returned to his right mind, and become what he should, displeasure against him afterwards is displeasure against a good person, instead of a bad one.

I do not say, that we ought always immediately to believe every one, who professes concern, and makes fair promises. But we certainly ought to be careful, that passion doth not keep us from believing what in itself is probable. Unless we are as ready to be reconciled, as we were to be provoked; and give as much credit, upon equal proof, to the penitence, as we did to the crime; we are not in a reasonable and Christian temper. If therefore the evidences of any one's amendment be strong enough only to suspend our bad opinion of him, we should suspend our anger too: and as they grow sufficient to change it, we should change proportionably into kind behaviour, and due esteem.

Indeed, supposing there be no amendment in him, though we cannot possibly think well of him in that respect, yet we may in others: for there are strange mixtures in most people of faults and good qualities. Or, were we to think ever so ill of him upon the whole, and with ever so much cause, we should by no means be at liberty, even then, to cherish a constant indignation at him boiling in our breasts: but our disapprobation of his character ought to be gentle and mild. For when anger, from being an occasional passion for a time, degenerates into a settled state of mind, it deserves a harsher name, that of rancour. And though in such a state we may appear composed,

and may in reality feel no vehement emotions, this alone is far from proving us innocent. If ill will be the principle of our conduct towards any of our fellow-creatures; if we suppress their merit, undervalue their good actions, give a bad turn to such as are capable of a better, aggravate their failures, and do them all the harm that we safely and quietly can; it is no alleviation, but the contrary, that we are able to do it without losing the command of ourselves. And there are some of so calm a malice, that they can plot and execute such mischief, as the most passionate man, in the very fit of his passion, would recoil at; and yet preserve to others, and perhaps to their own minds, the shew of being very good-tempered. But this deliberate silent hatred, as it is the deepest rooted and most durable, so it is the most horrible depravity of all others, and the farthest distant from that spirit of forgiveness, without which, we shall not be forgiven.

Let us therefore *in malice be children: but in understanding, men**: *let us not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*†.

* 1 Cor. xiv. 20. † Rom. xii. 21.

SERMON V.

EPHESIANS IV. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

THE due bounds of anger, with the common excesses of them, have been described in my two last discourses: and therefore I now proceed,

II. To dissuade you from them, by shewing you their bad effects; of which you cannot but have seen many already: but still it will be needful to set forth part of them more distinctly, and add others to them.

Some ill consequences of immoderate anger we feel immediately from the very workings of it within us. For the passion, prone as we are to indulge it, is essentially uneasy. The goodness of God hath constituted our inward frame in such a manner, that the kind affections are all attended with delight: but those emotions, which tend to give others pain, produce it first in ourselves; to restrain us from ever indulging them further than is necessary. The lowest degree of displeasure, as the mere word implies, must be unpleasing; presents unwelcome thoughts and views of things to the mind, which more or less unfit it, so long as they last, for the cheerful and easy enjoyment of life. But if it rise to any heighth, its agitations are acutely miserable: they rack and tear our souls; and, if they return frequently, consume our health and vigour: though indeed, were we ever so strong to bear them, there is no happiness in being able to support the renewal of torments. Then, be-

sides this inseparable feeling, there must often, as it is very fit there should, be a second, for the time almost intolerable, that of failing in the mischief, to which our fury prompts us. And yet success in it will only, after a short-lived inhuman transport, bring on a greater variety of dreadful sufferings. For there quickly succeeds a state unspeakably painful, of rage at ourselves instead of others; or at least of exhausted spirits, dejection at the remembrance of our wickedness and folly: bitter, and it may be, fruitless, anguish for the cruel things, that we have said or done. And the longer it is, before we reflect thus, the more matter we hoard up to make reflection frightful, when it comes.

Indeed one single consideration might be enough to prove anger a wretched condition; that our enemies are always endeavouring to put us into it: whom it is an innocent revenge to mortify, by resolving to disappoint them: and preserve ourselves in a calm, whatever storms we see around us. He, who doth this, hath found the true secret for passing his days with comfort, and conducting his affairs happily. Such a one sees on all sides of him, and apprehends every thing just as it is: makes the most of each favourable opportunity: and gives disadvantageous circumstances the best turn, of which they are capable. But passion so infatuates men, that they run directly upon evident ruin without perceiving it: nor will they always avoid it, when they do perceive it. *A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but a fool rageth, and is confident**. At best, they often lose a point of consequence by their warmth about a trifle: disoblige in a fit of peevishness their most zealous friends, and sometimes turn

* Prov. xiv. 16.

them into the most dangerous adversaries. For past intimacies furnish peculiar means of doing hurt for the future: and a *brother offended is harder to be won, than a strong city**. Then, at the same time that they provoke needless enmities, they give all their enemies needless advantages: often betraying their own designs, perpetually forwarding those of their opposers. For while they rashly press on upon others, they lay themselves open without defence, and verify the saying of the wise king: *He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls*†. Nothing requires more coolness, than what usually raises the most heat: meeting with unreasonable opposition. They who cannot pass by small injuries unnoticed, will generally draw down great ones upon their own heads. For anger on such occasions, however just, serves only to make bad people worse, and afford them handles for doing more effectually what they wish. *Kindle not* therefore *the coals of a sinner, lest thou be burnt with the flame of his fire. Rise not up in anger at the presence of an injurious person, lest he lie in wait to entrap thee in thy words*‡.

Another grievous disadvantage of a passionate temper is, that it hinders men from receiving advice. Not every one dares, and no one hath encouragement, to give it them. For they will seldom bear the intimation of an error in what they do, or an objection to what they propose. Nay, too commonly, alledging reasons against a thing, increases their positiveness in favour of it. For anger joins the two unfittest companions in the world, rashness and obstinacy. Or, if good counsel chances to be once followed, the same impatience, which hath brought

* Prov. xviii. 19. † Prov. xxv. 28. ‡ Eccles viii. 10, 11.

them into one difficulty, will soon bring them into another, as bad. So that, to use Solomon's words, *a man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again**. What usually inflames our resentments is the desire of promoting our own schemes and interests. Now, on the contrary, this is the very inducement, which should moderate and check them. For however triumphantly outrageous people may seem to bear down all before them for a time: yet it is ever the cool head, that carries the point at last. *Better is the end of a thing, than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools*†. But supposing persons of this turn to have at heart, not their own private interest, but public good: very often their heat will mislead them to do evil instead of it; and that, most dreadful evil. For the strong impression of being in the right, under which they act, inclines them to run greater lengths in what is wrong, than any thing else could. And thus *the wrath of man worketh not*, even when he may intend it, *the righteousness of God*‡. Indeed were a design ever so well chosen, and harmlessly carried on, yet few things are so likely to hinder the success of it, as too great vehemence: which hath also this further inconvenience, that after they, whom it animates, have spent their first fire, they are the aptest of all others to flag and despair, and abandon their undertaking.

But, besides that we thus embarrass and disappoint ourselves, we ought to reflect, what sort of figure we make to others. Generally people endeavour to hide their frailties: *but he that is hasty of spirit*, proclaims

* Prov. xix. 19. † Eccl. vii. 8, 9. ‡ James i. 20.

his; and, as the Scripture expresses it, *exalteth folly**. He aims at the appearance indeed of great importance and superiority: and would have it pass for inward strength, that he exerts himself so immoderately. But unreasonable passions are no more a proof of healthy vigour in the soul, than fevers or convulsions are in the body. Every little accident affects and flutters an infirm constitution: while those of a juster make bear considerable changes undisturbed. In the same manner a rightly tempered mind repulses even great assaults without effort, and remains unmoved: while the slightest trials put a weak one into remarkable agitations. Persons of the tenderest frames, of the smallest experience and knowledge, of the lowest or the most impaired faculties, have usually the least command of themselves, when provoked. Nor doth the sudden fierceness, with which resentment inspires men, at all imply true bravery, though it may accidentally produce some effect, like it: for this even extremity of fear will do. Then further, excessive anger is attended with all imaginable symptoms of weakness. For it makes the wisest people say and act the silliest things that can be; and become quite ridiculous, whilst they aim to appear terrible: threatening what they dare not do, attempting what they cannot do, and what, when the mad fit is a little over, for the world they would not, if they could: exposing themselves by the most wretched false reasonings; laying great stress upon trifles, that will bear none at all; and, when one wild assertion is confuted, running instantly to another to justify their choler, and all in vain. So piteous is the figure, that the passionate make: and it is often a lasting shame, which the blustering

* Prov. xiv. 29.

affectation of false greatness brings upon them in a few moments. Composure is an essential part of true dignity: and an elevated soul is above taking notice of the impotent attacks, which a mean one shews its meanness by busying itself to resent and return.

Some sort of exorbitant anger indeed is far from deserving contempt: but in proportion as it ceases to be despicable, it becomes hateful. Nay, it hath often both these bad qualities at once. The little fretfulness that goes no further than peevish words at every turn, though an object of derision, yet breaks grievously in upon the quiet of life, and freedom of conversation: puts every one, that comes near the person subject to it, under very disagreeable restraints; and usually to small purpose. For the least incident of a thousand shall be sufficient to turn his highest good humour into a furious rage, a perverse captiousness, or a sullen silence: while he himself doth not know, or is ashamed to tell, at what he is offended; and yet, like a froward child, grows the more unmanageable for the pains taken to please him. This must cause uneasiness to all that see it: but some have a tenderness of mind, that makes them feel it acutely. They fear they have done amiss, and search in vain for what can have given such great disgust. But especially they who have either any affection for such an unreasonable person, or any interest depending on his regard for them, must be perpetually miserable with him. So that, when these wretches do no worse, they perplex and disquiet every one about them; and those most, to whom they should be the kindest. But when their passion bursts forth with any uncommon degree of vehemence, then it hath effects yet more serious: the

most grating and disobliging things are said, that can be invented; failings unmercifully exposed; cruel imputations, though known to be false, injuriously made: secrets divulged, that ought to have been for ever hidden; promises broken, that should have been kept inviolably: and all this, merely because an inconsiderate creature is pleased to be in a rage, perhaps without a shadow of ground for it.

Thus even the more transitory fits of anger hurry men into behaviour extremely wicked: and a storm of fury, that possibly doth not last a quarter of an hour, destroys or grievously diminishes the comfort of another, it may be through all his days. But when their displeasure takes deeper root, and infects the temper with a settled ill will; then they will make it the business of their lives to depress and sit heavy upon the object of their malignity, to frustrate his most equitable expectations, and follow him about with unwearied labours to blast the success of every thing, which he undertakes. Neither generosity, nor humanity, nor goodness of character, nor nearness of relation, nor greatness of favours received, can extinguish their resentment: which sometimes conceals itself under specious pretences and smiling appearances, watching the opportunity of some effectual mischief; at others incapable of disguise, it blazes forth in open violence; laws and punishments, human and divine, are unable to deter them, and nothing short of immediate destruction will assuage their hatred. How pernicious must people of this character be in society; how dangerous must they appear in the eyes of men, how guilty in the sight of God! Guilty, not only of all the evil, which they have directly done; but all, which they have either incited others to do for them, or provoked others to

do against them. For *an angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression* *.

The misbehaviours and cross accidents, of which this world is full, were intended to exercise those virtues of meekness and patience, which the next world is intended to reward. But to use the vexations of life as opportunities to run mad and do mischief, is acting contrary to the whole design of our Maker; contrary to the native tenderness of our own hearts, to our consciousness of human frailties, to the pity we ought to feel for the miseries of human circumstances; contrary to the dictates of natural religion, which requires us to imitate the goodness we adore, and to the most express precepts of Christianity, which allows us not the least hope of God's mercy on any other condition, than this, that *if we forgive men their trespasses, our heavenly Father will also forgive us* †.

But here some will plead, that however hurtful to ourselves or others this passion may be, it cannot be so sinful as it hath been represented, because it is often involuntary. And some degrees of it we must own, seem to be so: and the temptations of our corrupt nature to very blameable degrees are often exceedingly strong. But still in such cases we are strangely willing to believe much less to be in our power, than, by the help of God's grace, is. And the way to know, how far it really extends, will be, not to imagine about it, and lament that we cannot do what in truth we can do very well: but to try, and that by the use of proper means. For they, who are totally unable to check their passion by an immediate effort of their mind at the time, had they governed themselves rightly before, perhaps would scarce have felt

* Prov. xxix. 22. † Matth. vi. 14.

any passion to check. And therefore I shall now proceed in conclusion,

III. To direct, how excessive anger may best be avoided.

Now the great general rule for this and every good purpose is, to obtain from God, by reading his Holy Word, by meditation and prayer, the spirit of love to him and to our neighbour. In proportion as that *rules in our hearts* *, we shall be humble and meek, live as being always in his presence, fear to offend him, desire to please him, labour to imitate him: we shall think often and seriously what great provocations from us our heavenly Father hath passed over, through so long a course of years; what shocking indignities our blessed Redeemer underwent contentedly and silently for our sakes; with what persevering patience the Holy Ghost offers to us his sanctifying influences, notwithstanding all we do to grieve him; how effectually pious men, in all ages, have been moved by these benefits to copy the divine long-suffering: we shall learn to bear with our fellow-sinners, with whom the Almighty bears: we shall call to mind, that he hath made them of the same blood, united them into the same body under Christ our head, strives with them by the same spirit: we shall recollect, that he commands us to forgive each others trespasses and promote each others happiness, and will treat us as we treat our brethren: that all the vexations which befall us here, if we go through them with the temper, which we ought, instead of doing us the least harm, shall unspeakably augment our felicity hereafter; and that by all the injuries, which others do us, however they may triumph in them at present, they are only *heaping coals of fire*

* Col. iii. 15.

*on their own heads**: a consideration, that surely should melt our anger into pity, and induce us never to go a step farther in correction or resentment, than security requires: but leave vengeance to him, whose it is. Thus then from the two inseparable commandments of love to God and man, flow inestimable motives to mild sentiments and gentle behaviour, by which pious and Christian minds will be powerfully influenced; experiencing not only their natural force, but the additional efficacy of divine grace, annexed to the use of them. And there is no other radical cure of irregular passions. But still, together with this universal medicine, there are several auxiliary and appropriated rules of regimen during our continuance in the course of it, to be followed, and therefore needful to be specified.

One is, that we avoid forming refined and romantic notions of human perfection in any thing. For these are much apter to heighten our expectations from others, and our demands upon them, than to increase our watchfulness over ourselves: and so every failure provokes us more highly, than it would have done else. A sense of things, too delicate for our nature, and the state in which we live, is no accomplishment, but an infirmity. And overstrained notions of friendship or honour, or any virtuous attainment, constantly do harm. For if we fancy ourselves arrived at these heights; we shall resent it as profanation, when the rest of the world treat us as being nearly on the level with them, which yet they certainly will. And if we go to measure those around us by these ideas; we shall look on persons, whenever we have a mind to do so, as monsters not to be supported, who, in a reasonable way of thinking, would appear

* Rom. xii. 20.

very tolerably good people. We should therefore endeavour, by frequent reflection, to form a habit of judging with moderation concerning our neighbours and ourselves. Man is a fallen being, defective in his understanding, and depraved in his inclinations; placed in circumstances, in which many things call him off from what he should do, many things prompt him to what he should not do; and often, before he hath well learned to distinguish one from the other, or too suddenly for him to apply the distinction rightly.

Now only reflect, when a multitude of such creatures as these are put to live together, with interests and appetites, humours and fancies, interfering every hour; what a number of wrong actions must of course be continually done, and some of them very wrong: which yet may be attended with such alleviations, that even a superior faultless nature, looking down upon our earth, would by no means impute all that was amiss, as heinous guilt to the persons that did it. This however is no reason, why we should indulge ourselves in failings: for wilful indulgence is always criminal. But it is a strong reason, why we should not be bitter against others, on finding them such, as we had cause to expect they would be: but receive a large share of uneasiness from them contentedly, and a small one, with thankfulness that it is no greater; especially considering, what we can never bear in mind too much, that no one of us is that superior faultless nature, which I have been supposing; but each of us a poor frail being, with the seeds in him at least of all the vile actions, that we charge upon others: and on the whole perhaps as bad, perhaps even worse than some of those, at whom we are so vehemently exasperated.

Almost every one is apt to join some notion of

peculiar dignity to his own person: and to imagine, that offences are greatly aggravated by being committed against him: that his character and concerns, his family and friends, his opinions and taste, ought to be treated with a singular degree of regard. But then really we should remember, that multitudes besides may just as allowably think the same thing of theirs; indeed that all men are as dear to themselves, as we can be to ourselves: which brings us back so far upon the level again. And the serious consideration of it must surely convince us, that our common interest, as well as duty is, to think and act mildly; that *pride was not made for man, nor furious anger for them that are born of a woman**.

Other directions must be given more briefly. One is, not to indulge ourselves in any sort of over great niceness and delicacy: for it hardly ever gives real pleasure, and it furnishes perpetual occasions of disgust and fretfulness. Another is, to avoid inquisitiveness after materials for anger to work upon. It is better not to hear of every little wrong thing that is done about us, or said of us. And therefore we should never encourage persons in the officiousness of acquainting us with them needlessly: but always have some suspicion of such as are peculiarly forward in it. For innumerable are the friendships and agreeable acquaintances that have been broken off, and the resentments and animosities raised, by tales and insinuations of this kind, either wholly or in part false: or idle and trifling, though true. Two other important rules, and closely connected, are: first, never to engage by choice in more business, than we can easily manage; for that, by causing hurry and frequent miscarriages, will certainly cause vexation

* Ecclus. x. 18.

and peevishness: then, to preserve a steady attention to what we do engage in. Men are often grossly negligent of their affairs: and afterwards furiously angry at those disorders in them, for which they themselves are almost, if not quite, as much to blame, as others. Now regular care would have prevented mismanagement; which alternate fits of remissness and rage will never do. Indeed we should obviate, as far as we can, every thing, that we find apt to ruffle our minds: and carry the precaution down even to our diversions and amusements. For some of these have often so very bad an effect upon the temper, that not to apply so easy a remedy as laying them aside, is really inexcusable. Another material thing to be shunned, is familiarity with passionate persons: not only for the very plain reason, lest they should provoke us, but also lest their example should infect us. *Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul**. But to converse with those, who are of mild dispositions, to observe how they take things, and be advised by them how we should take them, will be of unspeakable service.

These are preparations before danger. When it approaches near, the main point is, to recollect, how dreadful it would be to give way and lose ourselves, and to resolve that we will not. Towards keeping this resolution we shall find it one great preservative, though it may seem a slight matter, not to let the accent of our speech, or any one of our gestures be vehement. For these things excite passion mechanically: whereas a *soft answer*, the Scripture tells us, *turneth away wrath*†: composes the spirit of the giver himself, as well as the receiver of it. Also

* Prov. xxii. 24. † Prov. xv. 1.

making use of the gentlest and least grating terms, that we can, will be extremely beneficial: and accordingly it follows there, that *grievous words stir up anger*.

But if such begin to present themselves, and struggle for vent, we must resolve to utter as few of any sort as possible: or, if it become requisite, none at all: but shut fast the door of our lips, *till the mastiff within hath done barking*, as is related to have been the practice of Socrates*. It is a painful restraint: but if we will remain masters of ourselves, it is absolutely necessary. For one hasty expression bursting out, makes freer way for another: till at last the banks are levelled, and the torrent carries all before it. *A patient man* therefore *will bear for a time, and afterwards joy shall spring up unto him. He will hide his words for a time, and the lips of many shall declare his wisdom*†. But above all, we should inviolably observe never to act in a heat. Thoughts, alas, will be too quick for us: a few improper words may escape: but actions are much more in our power. We may be too angry at present to venture upon acting at all: a little delay can do no harm, and may do a great deal of good. Only when we take time, we should make a right use of it; not revolve an insignificant offence in our minds, interpret little incidents with perverse acuteness, and lay stress upon groundless fancies, till we work it up into a heinous crime. The best understandings, without good tempers, can go the greatest lengths in

* Προς δε το μη συναρπαθηναι συνιργει τα μεγιστα εθιθηναι—σιωπαν ως αν της ενδοθεν αναζεσεως αισθωμεθα κατασταλεισης, και ο εν ημιν κυων μηκετι υλακτη. Λεγεται γουν και Σωκρατης, ειποτε θυμωθειη, παντως σιωπαν. Simpl. in Epict. c. 28. p. 135. Comp. Cic. ad Quintum fratrem, l. 1. ep. i. §. 13.

† Ecclus. i. 23, 24.

this way: and employing their reflection to excite the displeasure, which it ought to restrain, the longer they ruminate, the more untractable they grow. Now passion may be trusted very safely to suggest all the aggravating circumstances. Reason therefore should be called in, only to represent the alleviating considerations: of which we perpetually overlook so many and so important ones, that we should give those about us all possible encouragement to remind us of them. And if the person, by whom we think ourselves aggrieved, be one, with whom we have any close connection, or of whom we have ground to think advantageously; laying our complaint mildly before him, and hearkening impartially to his answer, may very possibly set all right, and place us on a better footing, than ever we were before. *Admonish a friend: it may be he hath not done it; and if he have done it, that he do it no more. Admonish thy friend: it may be he hath not said it: and if he have, that he speak it not again. Admonish a friend: for many times it is a slander; and believe not every tale. There is one, that slippeth in his speech; but not from his heart: and who is he, that hath not offended with his tongue? Admonish thy neighbour, before thou threaten him: and, not being angry, give place to the law of the Most High**. Only this caution ought to be observed in the case, that such, as are naturally warm and impatient, should but seldom risk a personal explanation at first: but rather employ some common well-wisher; on whose probity and prudence they can safely depend, that he will moderate, not inflame, matters by interposing. And when thus or any way, the subject of difference is rightly stated: if the other party be innocent, let us admit it with

* Ecclus. xix. 13—17.

pleasure; if he own his fault, though not so fully as he should, let us receive his acknowledgment with generosity. And if, in return, he brings a charge against us: let us say with calmness what we have to say justly in our own favour; confess frankly with due concern, whatever hath been amiss; and where there is no room for a defence, attempt no palliation; but follow the injunction of Scripture: *If thou hast done foolishly, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth**. It will be very dishonourable, and very strange in him, to treat us unkindly upon this. But if he doth, we must submit patiently to what we have brought upon ourselves; and not be guilty of a second misdemeanor, because our first is not handsomely forgiven us.

These rules we shall, every one of us, more or less, violate. But then, through God's grace, we may turn even our transgressions of them to our benefit, by gaining such experimental knowledge of ourselves, as will supply us with specific directions fitted to our own case; and on that account far surer to be successful at last, than any more general ones, that can be prescribed to us by others.

And now, after thus delivering rules for the prevention or cure of unwarrantable resentment, both which are works of no small difficulty, let me add in conclusion, that all around us ought to assist us in them: and particularly by conscientiously abstaining from throwing in our way any temptations to that sin. The intemperate heat of the passionate is very blameable: but the deliberate wickedness of the cool and artful, who rouse them into passion, is abominable: and even the sportful teazings of malicious mirth, when employed against such, deserve no

* Prov. xxx. 32.

slight censure. St. Paul twice admonishes parents, *not to provoke their children to wrath**: probably because it might be likely to give an early wrong turn to their tender minds. Now, if it be unlawful to excite a short-lived anger in these, who are many of them incapable of doing hurt, be they ever so angry; how great a crime is it to stir up rage, where the consequence may be unknown mischief of various sorts: and how excellent a duty, to take every opportunity, (and we have all of us frequently such) for disposing the hearts of those about us to that spirit of meekness and universal good-will, which is the qualification for happiness here and hereafter! *The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*†. *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, and reap in mercy*‡.

* Epiph. vi. 4. Col. iii. 21. † James iii. 18. ‡ Hos. x. 12.

SERMON VI.

MATTH. II. 16.

Then Herod, when he saw, that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth; and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under; according to the time, which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

THE piteous history, contained in these words, is the sequel of that, immediately preceding, which informs us, that, on the birth of our Saviour in Judea, some Gentiles of learning and distinction came from the East to Jerusalem, by divine direction, to pay him homage: on which, Herod the king, understanding that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, sent them thither to find him; with a charge to bring him notice of the place where the child was, that he also might do him the same honour; designing really to destroy him, instead of paying him respect: but that, *being warned of God, not to return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way**.

The sad consequences which followed their departure, are mentioned in the words of the text; and present to us a transaction of so remarkable a nature as well deserves a particular examination into it, and an explanation of the several circumstances attending it. This is what I mean to give you in the following discourse: and if, in doing it, I should be led

* Ver. 12.

to spend more time, in proportion, than usual, on points not immediately belonging to the great articles of Christian faith or practice: you will remember, that we ought to understand, not only the doctrines and precepts, but the history of the Gospel: especially as in the present unbelieving age, objections are too frequently made against the several parts of it, in their turns; and as a due consideration of every part will not only confirm us in the truth of it, but furnish abundantly more matter of pious and moral reflection, than at the first view it may seem to afford.

The text begins with acquainting us, that *Herod when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth.* Not that they had any design of provoking him, or exposing him to contempt. That is not the behaviour of good persons to the very worst. He had commanded them indeed to *bring him word again,* where the child was: but probably had too haughtily presumed on their compliance, though not his subjects, to think of asking a promise of them. Or had they made one, as they naturally enough might with a full purpose of keeping it; the warning, received from God, must entirely have superseded that obligation: of which, other things also might have hindered the performance. But unreasonable and vehement spirits hardly ever stay to inquire into such matters: whatever disappoints them, appears to them an indignity. And accordingly Herod was not only sorry, that his intention was frustrated, but *exceeding wroth:* imagined it no sin at all to contrive the murder of the harmless child whose birth had been notified to him; but an intolerable offence, that the wise men should, whatever their reason was, fail to be made his instruments for accomplishing it.

And now, his wickedness increasing as his rage boiled within him, rather than miss of committing the one crime, which alone he designed at first, he resolves to commit he knows not how many more of the like sort, without any other pretext for them: imagining that the object of his apprehensions continued still in the same place. On that imagination solely, either having first enquired after him in vain, (for he was removed by the direction of God,) or conceiving, that no certain information would be obtained by a person so abhorred as he knew himself to be, and that taking time for a search was giving time for an escape; he forms the shocking resolution of killing all the children of Bethlehem, and its territory; unmoved by conscience, or compassion, or fear of revenge, or the detestation of mankind, in order to make sure of killing that child, from which, of all others, he ought to have abstained, the long-expected *hope of Israel* *, the great promised blessing to that religion, which he himself professed. This direful purpose he orders to be put in immediate execution: too many find their interest in obeying his will: no one hath power, or courage, to resist it: the deed is done: the poor infants miserably slain.

No wonder, that *then*, as St. Matthew observes, *was fulfilled*, that is, verified anew, more eminently and literally, *what was spoken* originally on a different occasion, *by Jeremy the prophet, saying:* In Rama, a town of Benjamin, adjoining to Bethlehem of Judah, which tribes were therefore probably mixed here, as well as at Jerusalem and other places; *In Rama, a voice was heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning: Rachel,* the mother of Benjamin, *weeping*, that is, in the persons of her female descendants, *for*

* Acts xxviii. 20.

her children; and would not be comforted, because they are not: are not any longer in this world, for a comfort and joy to their friends; but taken away, to their inexpressible affliction, by a stroke of violence, the most unexpected, the most afflicting and desolating, the most exquisitely painful and insupportable, that can be conceived.

Some perhaps may be tempted almost to doubt, whether a human creature be capable of such barbarity. But, alas, we cannot tell to what degree our own dispositions might be depraved, were we to give ourselves up to iniquity, and provoke a just God to withdraw his grace from us. Much less can we be sure what amazing abominations others may come to harbour within their breasts. *The heart* of man *is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it**? But especially the hearts of tyrants, grown old in the possession and exercise of absolute power, accustomed by flattery and pride to think themselves of a higher species than the rest of mankind, hardened to executions and slaughter by long use, become suspicious of every person and thing, by experience of the falshood of others, and consciousness of their own; and habituated to hate their subjects; as knowing that they are hated by them. Now such, if ever man was, Herod was. His whole history, written not by a Christian, but a Jew, fully proves that no degree of cruelty was improbable concerning one of a nature so savage: who, besides the fierce wars, in which his boundless ambition engaged him, was committing murders in cold blood throughout his life; of his nearest relations amongst others, even of his own children; every one of them from motives of state-jealousy, the very inducement

* Jer. xvii. 9.

that prompted him to the inhumanity charged on him in the text: and was so far from relenting at the approach of death, which commonly inspires less hardened sinners with penitence and mildness, that he caused a large number of his principal subjects to be assembled; and putting them under confinement, bound those about him by an oath, to massacre them all, as soon as he should expire; that the nation might mourn for his decease on that account, which on all others, he knew, would rejoice *. It is in vain to say of such a one, that he shewed on many occasions a great concern for his reputation: and therefore was not likely to commit so monstrous a murder, as that of these children. He did so, when he could gratify his vanity, without prejudicing his imaginary interests: but never else. And therefore his proceeding without mercy in this case, far from being incredible, is only an evidence, that the expectations of the Messiah's coming at that time were great and general; and his own apprehensions of it inexpressibly strong.

But still it may be wondered, if Herod was guilty of so execrable a deed, that no ancient historian should record it, and paint it in its due colours, as they have done many things, which deserved it less: but should all, excepting St. Matthew, omit the mention of it †. Now, in truth, there is no ancient heathen historian of those times extant, besides Suetonius; whose work is only a brief account of the lives of the twelve Cæsars; in which a narrative of this kind is by no means to be expected. And, were all the historians of that age remaining; Judea, lay at the

* Joseph. Ant. l. xvii. c. 6. §. 5. Bell. Jud. l. i. c. 33. §. 6.

† Joseph Scaliger is said to have denied the genuineness of this part of St. Matthew. Assaldi hath defended it, in a book, intituled, *Herodiani Infanticidii Vindiciæ*, 4°, *Brixiæ*, 1747.

extremity of the Roman empire, nor was, in Herod's reign, a province of it, properly speaking; the smaller internal affairs therefore of such a petty district would be little regarded, amidst so many of greater importance. And, though the murder of a number of innocent babes excites in us, with the utmost reason, the strongest pity and horror; yet, alas, the case was far otherwise during the days of Pagan darkness; when, in the most civilized nations, parents destroyed, or exposed to destruction, their own children, at pleasure, how strange soever it may seem, without scruple and without punishment.

But further, it doth not appear, that any other old authors ever did write the life of Herod, or the history of his reign, than Nicolas of Damascus, and Josephus. Now the work of the former is lost. And he was not only a courtier and domestic friend of Herod, but was employed as embassador to Augustus, to defend him in his life-time, and his character after his death, from imputations of tyranny and cruelty, brought before that emperor by the Jewish nation *. This man therefore neither would be inclined to relate such things of him in his book; nor could do it indeed, without condemning himself for having been his apologist. Besides, he was so shamefully partial to him, as to deduce his genealogy from a noble Hebrew family; though it was notorious that his father was an Edomite †.

As for Josephus: he wrote at the distance of above ninety years after the fact: which we are apt to consider, as taking away many more lives, than probably it did. Bethlehem was not a large place: whether its

* Joseph. Ant. l. xvi. c. 9. §. 4. & c. 10. §. 8. & l. xvii. c. 5. §. 4. & c. 11. §. 3. and Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 6. §. 2.

† Joseph. Ant. l. xiv. c. 1. §. 3.

territory was, we know not. The order given could be only against the male children. Herod, we are told, slew all these, under a certain age: that is, all whom the messengers of his bloody purpose found. But possibly, going on so shocking an errand, they might not be desirous of executing their orders with the utmost secresy and strictness. Or, if they were; the alarm, once taken, would quickly spread; and a considerable proportion undoubtedly be carried away, or concealed. The fabulous legends tell us indeed of vast multitudes killed: but allege no sufficient proof of their assertions *. And the wiser authors, even of the Popish communion, disregard and ridicule them. Now, supposing the number of the slaughtered infants to be small; the memory of what a few villagers had suffered, might easily, when printing was unknown, and writing not near so common as now, be, in much less time than ninety years, quite buried under the stories of the many large executions, which the tyrant had made, of persons more noted. Or it might be industriously stifled by the unbelieving Jews, to prevent it from being of service to the cause of Christianity. Or indeed it might be utterly overwhelmed by the total destruction of their country, with the slaughter of millions, which had happened before Josephus began to compile materials for his book. It is therefore extremely possible, that this massacre, though perfectly true, might never come to his ears: or, if it did, yet not with any certainty. And, if his information about it seemed

* Jerom saith, *Herodes, Scribæ et Pharasæi, pro uno infante multa parvulorum millia trucidarunt.* Com. in Is. l. 3. c. 7. vol. 4. p. 112. Ed. Veron. But he lived about 400 years after the time. And as he asserts, what the least reflection would have shewn him was false; that the Scribes and Pharisees were guilty of this fact, he deserves no credit in what lay more out of his knowledge.

to him rather doubtful, he did wisely in passing it over.

But supposing him ever so sure of it; he might think proper only to involve it covertly in a general account of the butcheries of Herod about this time; occasioned, as he saith, which is exceedingly remarkable, by the expectation of a new king*. For he might be unwilling, or even afraid, to offend the posterity of that monarch, with one of whom, Agrippa, he was intimate, by the express relation of a barbarity so unmanly: and might think, that he had sufficiently given his readers to understand Herod's character, without saying more†. If the testimony concerning our Saviour, ascribed to him, be genuine; his omitting to name these children will be an objection of small weight against the Gospel history. And if that testimony be not genuine; it will be no wonder in the least, that he, who, for the sake of paying court to Vespasian as the foretold Messiah, could suppress the mention of Jesus, and his miracles, should avoid to record a fact, which must have brought the same Jesus in view, under that character; and Bethlehem, as the place where the Messiah should be born‡. He hath been silent, in other parts of his work, for much less reasons, about many con-

* Ant. l. xvii. c. 2. §. 4.

† Josephus, in his own life, §. 65. saith, "It is necessary that an Historian should write truth: but he may allowably avoid charging on some persons their ill actions with bitterness; not for their sakes, but for that of his own moderation." But he saith this, not in relation to Herod, but to excuse himself for not having expostulated till then with Justus, on the falsehoods contained in his history of the Jewish war, published before that of Josephus.

‡ Perhaps for a like reason Justus never mentioned the Christians, though they made no contemptible figure then in Palestine.

siderable things, of which he must have known the truth*. Indeed it is so frequent in all histories for one author to pass over things, even of great consequence, which another relates, that if this were to be made a ground of suspicion concerning the articles thus omitted; scarce any author could preserve his credit, and certainly not Josephus: for in very much of what he delivers, he stands entirely single, and unsupported. Another material consideration is, that as he wrote long after St. Matthew, whose Gospel must have been well known in Judea; he might, and surely would, have contradicted him in this point, if he could: which he hath not.

It may be added further, that Macrobius, a Roman writer, who lived indeed a considerable time after both of them, in the beginning of the fifth century, but saith he compiled his performance out of earlier books; and who, by putting Syria instead of Bethlehem, shews, he did not borrow this part from the New Testament; and who, being a Heathen, was not partial to the Gospel history; mentions Herod's murder of the children, as a known truth†. And his joining another fact with it, which possibly happened at a month's distance from it, is by no means enough to discredit his testimony: which will be greatly confirmed, if we believe Sixtus Senensis, a learned man who lived two centuries ago, and saith he read the same account with that of Macrobius, in a part, now lost, of Dion Cassius, a Pagan historian, 100 years older than Macrobius‡. A book also, of un-

* See Ottii Spicileg. in Joseph.

† See, concerning these particulars, Massom's Appendix to Bishop Chandler's Vindication.

‡ See Dr. Gregory Sharpe's Argument in Defence of Christianity, p. 41.

certain date written in Hebrew by a most virulent Jew, admits Herod to have done this deed*.

But whatever may be said concerning the omission of it by others, possibly you may wonder, that all the Evangelists, excepting St. Matthew, should omit it. For they all relate the same matters in several instances of less moment: but then these were chiefly, if not solely, matters which came to pass after our Saviour's public teaching began, and at which they were present. St. Luke and St. John have each of them many particulars, and even St. Mark hath some, which none of the rest have. And plainly no one of them undertook to publish a complete history of our Saviour's life: but each wrote those occurrences which he knew or remembered best, or judged the most needful to be inserted in his narrative. What the beloved disciple saith of his own Gospel, may be extended to each of the former. *Many other things Jesus did,* (and doubtless other persons did in relation to him,) *which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye may believe*†. The fact now before us was not the most necessary to be known. Had St. Matthew likewise been silent about it, our faith would still have had abundantly sufficient evidence. But when he had related it, here was less need, that the Gospels, which came after, should. And perhaps the greater wonder is, that so many such things are repeated in them, than that so few are.

But hence arises one very natural and important

* Toldoth Jeschu, published by Huldrick at Leyden, 1705, 8vo. p. 11, 12. But perhaps he might take the fact from St. Matthew, only perverting it, as he doth absurdly, to his own purpose.

† John xx. 30, 31. xxi. 25.

observation more: that St. Matthew could have no temptation to forge a story, which was no way essential to his design, and might have been so easily disproved when he wrote, if it was not true; especially, as he is understood to have written in Judea. Or, if he had been so rash, the early writers against Christianity would have charged him with it, and the early writers for it endeavoured to defend him: and there is not the least appearance of either.

Still one circumstance may seem attended with a difficulty. Why should Herod carry his cruelty so far, as to slay all the children *from two years old and under*, when one year, or half a year, if not less, would have answered his ends as well? Now here perhaps we commonly mistake the Evangelists. For learned men have held, that the original word, translated, *from two years*, may mean, not, from two years completed, but from two years begun; from the entrance into the second year. But if that be doubtful: yet Herod, notwithstanding that he inquired exactly when the star appeared to the wise men, could not be sure, nor they tell him, whether it appeared to them exactly at the birth of the child, or some time after it. Nor do we know, how long it might be after that appearance, that they were able to settle their affairs and begin their journey; nor from what distance they came, nor what hindrances might happen in their way; nor what stay they might make at Jerusalem before Herod sent for them; and then, before he dismissed them: nor consequently, how old the child was when they saw him. The slaughter of the innocents is appointed in our calendar to be commemorated three days after the nativity. If that was supposed to be the real time, the meaning

must have been, not to place it, or the coming of the wise men, preposterously, before the appearance of the star, which is fixed in our calendar to the twelfth day, but to place it almost a year after. And if the child could either in reality, or in Herod's imagination, be almost a year old; a wretch of such unspeakable jealousy as he was, and whose express character it is, in the Jewish historian, rather to go too far in his fears and suspicions, than fall short*, would by no means think it safe, especially in his passion, to give an order extending to much less than two years.

These, I think, are all the objections and doubts, that can well be raised in relation to this part of the gospel narrative. And if any of them hath received a more satisfactory answer, than it was beforehand imagined could be given; a modest and equitable mind will be ready to conclude, that other Scripture difficulties also may in all likelihood be fairly solved, whether the particular manner of doing it appear at present, or not.

It will now be asked, what use we are to make of this piece of history? and here perhaps it may be worth while just to observe, that in the first place we should be careful not to make a bad one. For a very bad and absurd one hath been derived down, though I hope not to many of the present generation, from the times of popish ignorance: in which persons imagined, that the day of the week, on which mass was annually performed in honour of these children, thence called Childermass day, was an unlucky one throughout the year, and unfit for the beginning of any business. But what shadow of

* Ant. l. xvi. c. 8. §. 2.

pretence is there, that, because we commemorate then Herod's doing a very wicked thing, we should abstain from doing such right and proper things, as fall in our way? not only this fancy, but all of this kind, are utterly without foundation in reason, Scripture, primitive Christianity, or daily experience, if people will but mind what passes, with common care and common sense. They serve to no one good purpose whatever: they fetter the hands of persons; and disquiet their minds with superstitious, which at the same time, are profane and irreligious, fears and observances: as if the providence of God did not always equally watch over us in our lawful undertakings; but he had given some days out of his own hands into those of the wicked one. Weak minds, it is true, may fall into such errors inconsiderately without much blame. But to cast them off, when you are warned of the nature of them, is an evident duty. I proceed to the proper uses.

And surely one of them is, to observe, how pitiable they are, who live under the arbitrary government of despotic princes, that may do, as often as their passions prompt them, the cruellest actions without controul; and to thank God from the bottom of our hearts, that we live in a land of law and liberty, where no such bloody commands as those of Herod, can be issued forth: but we enjoy securely whatever is dear to us; and the meanest, while innocent, hath nothing to fear from the greatest. There are, at this day, countries in the world, where every thing lies at the mercy of one bad man: and on very slight provocations, not only children, but men, women and children, are instantly destroyed at the word of command.

Another point is, to take notice, for a caution to us, what amazing lengths of sin human creatures are capable of going, unless they stop themselves at first; especially when love of power and dominion hurries them on: and how possible it is for the vilest of designs to be covered, as Herod did his, with pretences of the utmost zeal for religion. Nor should we omit to remark at the same time, how painful the agitations of an evil heart must surely be, while it is working itself up to resolutions and deeds of such horror, and how terrifying its reflections afterwards. But especially we should dwell on this meditation, which arises most naturally from the subject before us, that opposing our own wisdom to that of Heaven is the grossest of all follies. Doubtless the crafty monarch, when he gave out his orders, applauded within himself more than a little the prudence of this master-stroke: and despised the cowardly politicians that have scruples, and stop at half way. But *why boasteth thou thyself, thou tyrant, that thou canst do mischief, whereas the goodness of God endureth yet daily* *? through that, wicked men will always fail, either of the point, at which they are aiming, or of the happiness which they expected from it. Herod failed even of the first. The infants, whom he would have wished to spare, he destroyed: the infant, whom alone he wished to destroy, escaped him. So he plunged himself into the deepest guilt, and gave up his memory to endless infamy; and got nothing by it of what he hoped. Thus was he *mocked,* not so properly *of the wise men,* though by means of them, as of God himself; according to the prediction, many ages before, concerning him, and all resembling him.

* Psalm lii. 1, 2,

Why do the Heathen so furiously rage together, and the people imagine a vain thing? the kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed. He, that dwelleth in heaven, shall laugh them to scorn: the Lord shall have them in derision *. Nor was he disappointed only, which he might know in this life, though we are not sure he did, but called soon after, in a dreadful and exemplary manner, to his final account: dying in all the agonies of a body tortured with a complication of noisome diseases, and a soul driven to the extremity of fury and despair: as the before-mentioned historian, Josephus, whose testimony in this particular cannot be suspected, relates at large.

From such dispensations of Providence as this, and from the gracious promises of God's holy word, his Church, though tenderly affected by the wickedness of its persecutors, as well as the frequent sufferings of its members, may yet learn to look beyond both, and contemplate with triumph its own security; the shameful defeats of the former, and, even if they appear to succeed, the glorious rewards of the latter. *The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee* †. Hence the days on which the Apostles and others died martyrs, have been joyfully observed as their birth-days: and shedding their blood, considered as sowing seed for the future increase of believers. Hence also the memory of these infants hath been celebrated in the assemblies of Christians from the primitive times: as we read in a work, that hath been ascribed to Origen,

* Psalm ii. 1, 2. 4. † Is. xxxvii. 22.

who lived 1500 years ago *. For their murder was regarded as a martyrdom undergone by them in deed, though not in will; since they lost their lives on Christ's account, and as the collect of our church for this festival expresses it, *glorified God by their deaths;* were instrumental in making the birth of his son, and his watchful care of him, remarkable in the highest degree. And thus conformably to the Psalmist's word †, inserted into the same collect, God *ordained strength,* gave additional evidence to the Christian faith, and by so doing, *perfected praise* ‡ to his holy name, even from the dying cries, which proceeded *out of the mouths of* these *babes and sucklings.*

Let us therefore likewise pay due regard to their memory: and look on it as their unspeakable happiness, that they were sent on such an account, by the tyrant's sword, to Heaven, in the morning of their days, secure from the danger of living to be wicked here, and miserable hereafter. Let us also apply the same consideration to any similar affliction of our own: for we cannot undergo a severer, and, few, if any, upon earth, have ever undergone so severe a one, as that of the poor parents of these children. Let us recollect from this instructive lesson, that the sharpest sufferings may fall on the most innocent persons; that the nearest of our relations, and dearest of our blessings, are God's property more than our own; but that, if he takes them from us, he not only can, but, unless it be our fault, will, make us ample amends in a better world: and that therefore, though we may lawfully mourn the loss of them, yet we ought meekly to submit to it; supported by the hope of a blessed

* Hom. 3. in diversos. † Psalm viii. 2. ‡ Matth. xxi. 16.

resurrection for them and ourselves; and applying to our own case, in a higher sense, what was originally said, perhaps in a lower, to Rachel, *weeping for her children: thus saith the Lord, restrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy* *.

* Jer. xxxi. 15, 16.

SERMON VII.

PROVERBS XII. 22.

Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they, that deal truly, are his delight.

NOTWITHSTANDING the advantages of reason, the condition of mankind would be very low and indeed very unhappy, if we did not also excel the rest of the creatures, which inhabit this earth, in a greater power of communicating our thoughts one to another. They have much fewer wants: and are taught by nature, almost immediately, how to supply them. But we are purposely formed to need and to give help in every thing, through the whole of our days: and therefore some ready and extensive method of signifying mutually whatever passes within our minds was peculiarly necessary for us. Without this, no person would have more knowledge of any thing than he could attain of himself: or more assistance in distress from his neighbour, than mere conjecture would direct him to think needful, and unrequested goodness incline him to bestow. The pleasure also, as well as the benefits of society, would be reduced to a narrow compass: and life hang upon our hands joyless and uncomfortable. But our gracious Maker hath furnished us with several ways of doing what we find so requisite. Our actions and gestures declare our meanings, in many cases, both clearly and strongly: and our looks have significancy, inexpressible any other way. The most intelligent of other animals

come not near us in either of these respects. But yet articulate speech, our more distinguishing property, hath, on the whole, much greater pre-eminences belonging to it: and, together with the improvement built upon it, of marking down words with ease in lasting characters, hath raised us to a much higher rank in the scale of beings, than we could otherwise have obtained.

Still unhappily, as every blessing in the world may be fatally misused, so there is hardly any one bad purpose, which language, though granted for the most excellent good purposes, may not be, and hath not been, perverted to serve. But it serves the most such, and the most effectually, by being turned from its original design of giving right information to those, with whom we converse, to the opposite one of leading them wrong: a practice so immoral and mischievous, yet so common; and so often seeming to be not only serviceable to the deceivers themselves, but defensible, or however not very blameable, in respect of such as they deceive; that few things are of more importance, than forming just notions concerning our obligations to veracity. And in doing this, though the principal point is to restrain men from taking over-great liberties, yet they must be guarded also against over-great scrupulousness: both because every precept ought to be represented fairly; and because, if this be not, some will be sufferers by observing, and others feel remorse for transgressing, imaginary duties; while much larger numbers, perceiving the rules given them to be in part too strict, will take occasion from thence to slight them all.

In order then to state this whole subject, I shall,

I. Shew, what things are to be reputed lies, and what not.

II. Consider the pleas, which are made to justify some sorts of lying.

III. Those which are brought to excuse others.

I. The leading question therefore is, what things are to be reputed lies, and what not. Now here,

1. Since actions and gestures, as well as words, may be employed to express what we think: they may be also employed to express what we do not think: which is the essence of a lie. Indeed some of our actions are naturally significative: whereas few of our words have any other import, than arbitrary consent and usage give them; as appears from the different languages of different nations. But then we have never consented to make our actions in general signs of our intentions, as we have our words. And if persons interpret an action of ours to mean this or that, which hath no certain meaning affixed to it, we deceive them not, but they deceive themselves. Nor are we bound, in point of truth, to explain it, in order to prevent this: but in point of charity and humanity we are, if we apprehend, that they may suffer any harm by mistaking, which we can obviate without suffering proportionable harm in their stead. Such actions therefore, as have no determinate sense appropriated to them by agreement, explicit or implied, can be no violations of sincerity: but such as have, are subject to just the same rules with words; and we may be guilty of as gross falsehoods in the former, as in the latter.

2. Words having acquired their significations by the mutual acquiescence of mankind, may change them by the same method. And not only single words may in process of time vary their sense greatly, but combinations of several words may come to have meanings, very different from what the terms, of

which they are composed, uninterpreted by practice, would lead one to apprehend. We all know what it is to be *humble*, and to be a *servant* to any one. But a person, who, in the common acceptation of the words, taken separately, cannot say he is either, may safely affirm that he is both, when they are joined together into an usual declaration of mere civility. And in general, whatever form of speech, though false in its primitive sense, is true in that, which custom hath adopted, may be used in it without fault, to those who understand it right: for there can be no lie, where we have no purpose of deceiving. But still, though we may, and possibly in some cases must, comply with such phrases, when once they are established: yet the fewer of them prevail, the better for several reasons.

The high-strained expressions of civility, which are so common, however innocent now, proceeded originally from a mean and fawning and fallacious disposition in those who began them: and tended to nurse up vanity and haughtiness in those, to whom they were addressed. In proportion as they become sayings of course indeed, and lose their meaning, they may lose their mischief. But if others of the same sort are coined from time to time to succeed them, this renews and perpetuates the mischief; besides the further inconveniences of making a language absurd, and imprinting a character of slavishness upon it, under a groundless pretence of refining and polishing it. For none of these flights were admitted amongst the best-bred people of the ancient world, till they had lost their good taste, as well as their virtue.

And as for the other phrases, of which custom hath changed or annihilated the signification, though after this is done, they are no longer lies, yet they were

lies all the while it was doing: and every new step, taken in the same road, will be a new lie, till every body finds it out, and learns the fashionable interpretation of it. And, as these innovations cannot be soon received universally, they embarrass and intangle timorous minds very grievously, and tempt the irresolute to do what they apprehend is not lawful, while, at the same time, they give those, who are not so scrupulous as they should be, dangerous encouragement to become less so than they were. For such, perceiving themselves authorized by general practice, or perhaps being directed by particular orders, to say in some cases things that look extremely like falsehoods, will easily go on to venture upon the most real falsehoods in any case, when they have occasion for them. These liberties therefore should be as sparingly used, and when they must be used, as carefully explained to all who are concerned in them, as possible: and a very serious attention shewn to prevent what a great and excellent man calls *our language running into a lie**.

3. As to all figures of speech, fables, allegories, feigned histories, and parables, those for instance of our blessed Saviour, and others in Scripture, intended only to convey instruction more agreeably or efficaciously, there is evidently no room to condemn these, as deceits. And whenever things are either said or written in such a manner, that the intention is visibly different from what the words would else import, this can never be a breach of truth, and may sometimes be a very proper and engaging way of recommending it. But the case is widely different, when persons, with all the marks of seriousness, affirm what they will afterwards despise and ridicule others for be-

* Archbishop Tillotson.

lieving. These are plainly designed falsehoods: and in a greater degree, or a less, injurious ones. When they do no worse, they put men's understandings, and tempers too, on a severe trial, without the least right or need: and, which determines the nature of them very clearly, if the hearer doth not expose himself, the speaker is disappointed. Surely this is *foolish talking, and jesting not convenient**. Nor however little hurt it may sometimes do, is the sentence at all too severe in general, which the wise king hath passed upon it: *As a madman, who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; so is the man, who deceiveth his neighbour, and sayeth, Am I not in sport*†?

4. Concerning ambiguous phrases, which in one acceptation express our meaning truly, but in another do not; it must be observed, that when we are bound, by promise or otherwise, to declare what we know or believe in any case, we are bound to declare it in such terms, as are likely to be well understood: else we fail of what we profess, or ought to do. And even when we are not thus bound, we should speak of things, if we can safely, with plainness and simplicity. For not only this adds greatly to the agreeableness and instructiveness of conversation; but, which brings it under the present subject, dark and doubtful sayings often deceive people to their detriment, and are too often designed to produce that effect. Yet still there may be reason for reservedness towards some persons, even in trifles. For they, who take the liberty of asking any questions, that may serve their turn, will commonly discover almost as much from the silence of one, who is usually communicative to them, as from his speaking. And

* Eph. v. 4. † Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.

whenever, after all our precaution, silence will not conceal a thing, which ought to be concealed, it must be allowable to speak upon the subject in such a manner, as to leave that part of it involved in obscurity, which is not fit to be revealed. Nay, though we foresee it to be probable, that any one, provided he hath no title to information from us, will take our words in a sense, in which we do not use them; yet if that in which we do use them, be a fair and natural one, and nothing but his own rashness leads him into error; though, as I said before, charity bids us hinder it, if we conveniently can, yet veracity requires it not. For when we design only to keep him ignorant of a fact, it is his own fault, if he will also believe a fancy. But if we go further and lay snares for him; if we give assurances, which, in their obvious and universal acceptation, are false, but only have a latent forced construction, in which, after all, they just may be true: this is equivocation; and cannot be defended, unless the grossest violations of sincerity can be defended too. For the intent of using language to deceive is equally evident in both; and the contrivance of couching the deceit in phrases liable to no suspicion, adds to the crime greater deliberation, and consequently more heinous guilt.

We are now therefore led to consider,

II. The pleas, which are urged to justify some sorts of direct lying.

For more than a few speculative, and some pious men, have imagined, that this practice in certain cases may do much good, and can do no hurt: and then is both allowable and commendable. Speech, they say, was given to mankind solely for their common benefit: nor consequently is it ever used amiss, when it contributes to that end. And this opinion they endea-

vour to confirm by several instances of falsehoods, which good persons are recorded in Scripture to have uttered knowingly. But, besides that some instances, which they produce, are not falsehoods, or were directed by an express authority, which can supersede ordinary obligations: good persons may too possibly both say and do what they ought not, through ignorance of their duty, or infirmity; and their commission of known and great sins is not always related with censure, it being unnecessary: to which it must be added, that some of their actions may be praised in holy writ on the whole, without the least intention of approving the circumstances of insincerity, or other imperfections, with which they were accompanied.

Another argument in favour of their notion they draw, somewhat surprisingly, from the apostle's words: *putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another* *. The precept, they say, must not be extended further, than the reason of it extends; which being only, that because of our mutual relation, we ought to consult our mutual advantage; where adhering to truth will not promote this, falsehood may be justly substituted. But though mutual advantage is a very strong tie upon us to speak truth, St. Paul hath not told us here, that it is the only one. And we experience ourselves to be under another more immediate. We feel a natural reluctance in our consciences to lying and deceiving, as such, without looking forward to consequences: and even they who have persuaded themselves that doing it is, in some instances, lawful, cannot do it however, without an inward sense of shame and guilt. Now it deserves

* Eph. iv. 25.

to be well considered, whether transgressing, in order to attain some supposed end of general utility, this dictate of our moral nature, the principle of which God hath planted there, be any more allowable, than transgressing the dictates of justice or any other moral obligation, with the same view: whether, in short, it be not, what the Apostle himself mentions with abhorrence, and that in the very case of a lie, *doing evil, that good may come* *.

Or, though still any one should think, that our native antipathy to speaking falsehood, no more proves it to be always forbidden, than our unwillingness to give others pain which notwithstanding we may and must give them sometimes, for the sake of a benefit more considerable: yet it must be observed, that the Scripture both allows and requires pain and even death to be inflicted in some cases: but uniformly forbids lying, without intimating in any one precept or declaration concerning it, the possibility of an exception. But were the consideration of Scripture to be set aside, which it never ought; still on the footing of mere reason and experience, a most important question would remain, what those instances are, in which, on balancing the two sides of the account, violation of truth is more beneficial than detrimental to mankind. For supposing any such can be found, it must be violated in them only. But if none such can be found, or if the advantage be at all doubtful, or not exceeding great, or attainable any other way, in the same or but nearly the same degree: the plain and the safe rule evidently is, that of *simplicity and godly sincerity* † in all cases.

The case indeed of an attack upon our own or our neighbour's property, or life, may seem a very favour-

* Rom. iii. 7, 8. † 2 Cor. i. 12.

able one to the opinion, which we are now examining. For here it is argued, that assuredly no one hath a right to rob or to murder; nor consequently suffers any wrong, when he is prevented from doing either. And if telling him a falsehood be the likeliest method of prevention: hath he not forfeited all claim to our telling him truth? And is it not much better in every view, that he should be deceived, than accomplish his wicked purposes? why, undoubtedly it seems very hard, especially upon the party endangered, to say otherwise. Yet this may and ought to be said, that on the one hand, all the little good, which a lie, that will scarce be credited, hath any chance for doing, may commonly with prudence be done without it, either by avoiding to answer, or by general and undetermined answers, which are very different things from untruths: and that on the other hand, instead of good, a lie may do much harm: as the vile wretches who attempt to commit such crimes, when they have once or twice found themselves, or others like them, imposed upon, may be provoked by it to grow much more suspicious and barbarous, than they would have been else. Therefore it may be doubted whether, in the main, transgression of truth, even in these circumstances, prevents or produces mischief. Surely then he, who refuses to transgress it, acts a worthier part: and, if he suffers any thing on that account, he suffers it *for* the sake of a *good conscience towards God**.

Another case is that of enemies in war: whom having a right to kill, it is said, we cannot but have a right to deceive, that being the smaller hurt of the two. And yet, not only such deceivers are treated with peculiar severity in war, as worse than common

* 1 Pet. ii. 19. iii. 21.

enemies; but faith must be preserved, even in the midst of arms: else a state of hostility would be yet more calamitous than it is, and besides would be endless too. For overtures of truce or peace could have no effect, if no confidence remained between the contending parties. Add to this, that if one side may deceive, the other may: and so neither is in a better condition, than if both abstained from it: and indeed the attempt of it by both, will for the most part be ineffectual*.

A third case, in which many plead for the lawfulness of making free with truth, is in dealing with those, who have either lost in a great measure the use of their understandings, or are not yet sufficiently arrived to it. For it is argued, that these have no title to conduct themselves, because they have no ability of doing it: and since the only service, that truth can do them, is conducting them properly; and instead of that, it will often only discompose them, and make them refractory: if employing falsehood will lead them on quietly in the right way, it can be no injury, and may be a great advantage to them. But consider: persons naturally weak, or, through infirmities, decayed, in their intellects, may be managed, with a little skill and care, intirely to their satisfaction, or, however, may soon be pacified again, by methods very consistent with sincerity. And they, whose disorder is a species of madness, are not only for the most part incredibly jealous, but more sagacious too, than is often imagined: and to what degrees, both of rage and violence, deceits, attempted

* Polyb. l. xii. p. 671. condemns deceit in princes and generals, even against enemies: which he saith the Achaians used not, and the Romans not much. He adds, p. 673. that truth always gets the better of falsehood sooner or later.

upon them and detected, will drive them, can scarce be credited. Whereas, plain dealing, if proper authority be mildly assumed along with it, will generally soon subdue them once for all; most of them submitting readily to it from a secret consciousness of their own state. Then as to children: it is true, they are easily cheated, and so for a while easily quieted. But what follows? that they quickly come to see through these artifices, and then are much more intractable than before, and quite outrageous on the very apprehension of your repeating them. Your credit with them is lost, the next time you want to use it for their good: and their sole aim for the future is to deceive the deceiver, gratify their own inclinations, and carry their own ends. Now treating them with fairness and steadiness, telling them only so much as was proper, but nothing that they should ever find to be otherwise than they were told, would have totally different effects: would teach them betimes to hear reason and yield to it; would prevent their agitating themselves with perpetual fits of passion, by shewing them clearly, what they were to expect, what they were to consider as unfit; and, which is a much greater benefit still, would habituate them from the first to integrity and honesty in their own behaviour: whereas perhaps one of their chief inducements to that vile trick of lying; of which most of them get something, and too many so much, that they never leave it; is what really makes their condition a pitiable one: that they learn it originally from its being used towards themselves by those, who afterwards reprove and punish them for it.

The last case, which I shall mention, is that of sick persons: concerning whom it is alledged, that com-

mon good nature directs us to conceal from them sometimes, be it ever so much at the expence of truth, the real name of their disease, the danger of their situation, the sort of medicines given them, and all facts of all kinds, which, if known, might deject or disturb them: for that not only such deceit is useful, but they upon whom it is practised, will, when recovered, approve it, and be thankful for it, nay, perhaps have already approved it, and set the example of it on former like occasions, and therefore have in effect consented to it now. But, plausible as this plea may appear, the need and the benefit of employing falsehood, even in these circumstances, for the most part at least, *cometh of evil**. It is because people will not in the time of their health become virtuous and reasonable, pious and resigned, that they want the wretched support of untruths in the time of sickness. And, if they who are about them scruple to support them thus, as they well may, then they are void of all consolation. But even supposing the lies, which they wish for, are told them; they will seldom be told so, as neither to be found out, nor suspected: and suspicions will often disturb sick persons more fatally, than knowing the worst would. Or, let prevarications of this kind work ever so happy effect on some particular occasions, yet there follows a most dreadful general inconvenience from them: that because some must needs be told their condition is hopeful and safe, though it be not; others are told in vain, that theirs is so, though it be; for their friends, they think, will affirm any thing, to please them. And thus, no more may recover by being deceived, than may be lost by the impossibility, arising from hence, of knowing that they are not de-

* Matth. v. 37.

ceived. Their lives may depend on the composedness of their spirits: their spirits would have been composed, if they could have believed those who attend them: but being sensible what liberties they will take in these matters, they cannot believe them; and therefore can have no relief or comfort from their assurances.

However, it must be owned, that in most or all of the above-mentioned cases, there are sometimes difficulties, with which we have much more cause to pray God we may never be tried, than to be confident that we shall judge and act rightly, if we are. And, therefore, though adhering strictly to truth, as the rule, which our Maker hath given us, and trusting him with the consequences, evidently appears to be the securest way: yet, if any one ventures to deviate from it with a visibly good intention, we should not, I think, pronounce a severe sentence upon him, considering how prone the best of us is to err in plainer things; always provided, that the liberties, which he takes, be few and modest, and almost extorted from him; and conscientiously restrained to things in themselves the least exceptionable. But if persons, because something may be colourably said for making a little free with truth on very uncommon occasions, where no one seems injured by it, will indulge themselves in whatever falsities they please on almost any occasion: if, because it hath been apprehended, that malefactors, and those with whom we are at war, have no right to veracity; and that such, as are incapable of judging at all for themselves, may be deceived for their advantage by others; if, I say, upon this, they will imagine they are allowed to treat one part of mankind as villains and enemies, with whom no faith is to be kept, and another as children

and fools, upon whom they may freely impose any way: this must proceed from a bad heart; and the tendency of it is, to dissolve intirely the bonds of human society, and open a high road to all possible wickedness and universal confusion. The arguments, were they ever so specious, for the lawfulness of fraud in seemingly harmless cases, can never prove it lawful in others of a nature quite contrary. But, I beg it may be observed, the extreme danger, which there is notwithstanding, of men's proceeding in falsehood to very pernicious lengths, if once they begin, is a most unanswerable objection against its being permitted in any degree at all.

A consideration so interesting must be urged more at large: and shall, God willing, the next opportunity. But I hope you have already seen very great reason to follow the son of Sirach's wise counsel, *Use not to make any manner of lie: for the custom thereof is not good**.

* Ecclus. vii. 13.

SERMON VIII.

PROVERBS XII. 22.

Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they, that deal truly, are his delight.

As the advantages, derived to mankind from the superior power, which we enjoy, of communicating our thoughts one to another, are very great; so the perversion of it to wrong uses is very pernicious. And no perversion of it can be so complete, as when we employ it, instead of informing others to deceive them. Now, of the more importance it is, that we should not be guilty of this crime, the more necessary it must be that we should know, wherein it consists, and how insufficient the pleas are, which in some circumstances have been made in its favour. Therefore I began to discourse on the subject of our obligation to truth by shewing,

I. What things are, and are not, breaches of it.

II. What breaches are unwarrantably by some persons thought justifiable.

And under this latter head, I first proved, that Scripture enjoins veracity, without authorizing any exceptions, and that indeed it is, in its own nature, a duty independently of consequences: then I confuted or counterbalanced the good effects ascribed to the violation of it in several particular cases: and lastly, intimated the general danger to which they who depart from it, expose themselves, and tempt others, of running on from one liberty to another, till at

length they venture to say, and afterwards to do, any thing, which they imagine will contribute to a good end: a practice productive of such dreadful evils, that I must enlarge upon it somewhat further.

Things, which every one allows to be good, no one needs to be cheated into. And where opinions differ, neither God nor man hath given us a right to bring over others into our own by falsehood: and on what foundation then can we take such a step? I may think, perhaps, that this or that thing would be for the benefit of the world, or of such a part of it, or individual in it. But this no more empowers me to use fraud, than to use force, for accomplishing it. Another person may think, at the same time, a different or a contrary thing beneficial: and may have as high an esteem of his own judgment, as I have of mine. If then I may employ deceit to serve my purpose, why not he to serve his? Now what can this end in, but the ruin of all integrity, and all confidence, amongst men? And what good can there be in view, that bears any proportion to such a calamity.

But some argue: Our opposers will certainly use falsehoods for their bad ends: if therefore we do not use it for our good ones, they have a plain advantage over us; and we shall be undone, for want of turning their own weapons against them. Now if this were the case; it would only be the case of suffering for truth, which is suffering for God: and hereafter, at least, no one will be a loser by that. But indeed, at present, upon the whole, the contrary is the case. If your opposers have recourse to unfair arts, detect those arts in them, and abstain from them yourselves: and whatever difficulties you may be under, for a time, in the conclusion all will come out well. *A*

*lying tongue is but for a moment: but the lip of truth shall be established for ever**. Uprightness, with only common prudence, will not fail to get the better at length: and the reason, why we experience it no oftener, is indeed that we try it so seldom. In the midst of our complaints, we do the very things, of which we complain. This is no combat of fair dealing against unfair, but of craft against craft: and perhaps our own artifices contribute more, than those of our adversaries, towards the loss of our cause. For the surest way of missing our aim is to sink in our credit. Therefore let the end, that we propose, be ever so good, it is neither right nor wise to use falsehoods for attaining it.

But, in fact, the ends proposed to be served by this method, fall usually very far short of being near so good, as they are pretended to be. Some blameable gratification, some worldly interest, some party point, the promotion of some bad or doubtful cause, is the thing which people, on such occasions, have at heart, however studiously they disguise their aims to others, and, if possible, to themselves. These are the purposes, for which truth is to be depressed, imposture countenanced; some considered as too weak, others as too wicked, to be treated with common honesty. And thus every one, who can but think hardly enough of those, from whom he differs, sets himself at liberty to speak to them, or of them, as insincerely as ever he will. And if he may venture upon false assertions; he will be apt to think, why not upon false oaths? And, if for the service of the public or his friends, why not for his own? How shocking a state of things would this introduce! Hear the Prophet's description of it: *They bend their*

* Prov. xii. 19.

*tongues, like their bow, for lies; but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth: for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour; and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, they weary themselves to commit iniquity. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit: through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the Lord**.

Nay further yet, if persons may falsify and perjure, where shall they stop? It will be said, why not purloin, why not rob, why not murder, to serve a good purpose, that is, a convenient one, for others, or themselves? Each liberty taken leads on, by a plain high road, to a greater: and observe, I intreat you, what a figure they make together in the word of God. *By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish*†.

But could we restrain the advocates for falsehood, and their disciples, to this offence only, and even to the seemingly more innocent sorts of it: yet real religion, real virtue, the real happiness of mankind, I believe have never on the whole been served by such arts: and seldom, if ever, hath it been designed that they should. Superstition indeed, and enthusiasm, have been greatly promoted by them: and infidelity not a little. For the lies framed in favour of religion have strangely discredited the truths urged in favour of it. And besides, as some have thought

* Jer. ix. 3—6. † Hos. iv. 2, 3.

it useful, and therefore allowable, to affirm whatever would conduce to the propagation of orthodox belief: others, on the same principle, have thought it as allowable to do the same thing for the propagation of unbelief. And, as the former have counted nothing too bad to be reported of those, whom they deemed the enemies of the faith: so the latter have thought scarce any thing, either too opprobrious to be said, or too improbable to be swallowed, in relation to the teachers and advocates of it. One side exclaims against religious, the other against irreligious, frauds; and so far as either are committed, both are in the right: but both lamentably overlook the obvious rule; that neither shall impute them unjustly, and neither be guilty of them at all. The mischiefs of the falsehoods invented to decry revelation are as plain, as, (what surely admits no doubt) its importance to the outward tranquillity, the inward peace, the present, the future welfare of men. And the sinfulness of falsehoods to support it, cannot be more strongly expressed, than in the words of Job: *Hear now my reasonings, and hearken to the pleadings of my lips. Will ye speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him?—Is it good, that He should search you out? or as one man mocketh another, do ye so mock him?—Shall not his excellency make you afraid, and his dread fall upon you**?

Thus far I have spoken concerning the lies, which to some have seemed lawful. And now I proceed to speak

III. Of such, as too many are apt to account excusable.

They own them to be in strictness faulty: but extenuate the fault in their imagination, till it comes

* Job xiii. 6, 7. 9. 11.

to appear little or nothing; and then venture upon them as freely, as if they were expressly permitted.

Thus, for instance, when persons have done amiss, and want to conceal it, if deviating a little from truth, will have that effect, and keep all quiet; they fancy it is a tolerably harmless method of preventing, at a cheap rate, a good deal of anger or contempt in others, and shame, if not further inconveniences, to themselves: But surely they ought to consider, that having committed one blameable action, which perhaps is but a folly, can never give them a privilege of committing a second, which is a sin. Besides, very few wrong things are done, but somebody hath a right to inquire into them, and be made acquainted with them. Now denying them to such, is plainly injurious to them; and according to the nature of the case, may be highly prejudicial. Nay, persons who have no title to any information, are intitled however not to be misled by false information: which often may do them disservice in many ways. Further, the hope of hiding faults thus, encourages the commission of them beyond all things: till there is hardly any wickedness, that some poor wretches will not venture upon; because they imagine there is hardly any from which they cannot clear themselves pretty well, in the opinion of others, by a few round assertions or denials, that seem to cost them little. But indeed nothing in the world costs them so dear, as this vile practice: for it continually accumulates fresh guilt upon them, engages them deeper, and entangles them more inextricably in bad ways; till they neither know how to mend, nor to get it believed, if they do. Commonly they are detected soon, always at last: and the older offenders they are before that happens, the heavier load of disgrace

and discredit falls upon them. But supposing they are able intirely to remove all suspicions from themselves: they well know, (which is a dreadful aggravation of their crime,) that ordinarily speaking, it must light on others, who are innocent. Nay, too frequently they are led on, (for the temptation, when once they have begun, is a dangerous one) to charge others in order to acquit themselves; or at least to insinuate concerning them what they are not bold enough to affirm.

The sin of falsehood therefore, on these occasions, being so mischievous and ensnaring, we should be very cautious not to drive into it those, who are under our influence, by severity when they happen to misbehave: but pass over slight failings with a moderate notice, if any; and grant them an easy pardon for weightier ones, on a penitent acknowledgment of them. Only we must not allow them to impose upon us by a pretended sincerity and concern, that produce no effect. For if once they learn a habit of doing wrong without fear, because coming and owning it will set all right again; we shall have no longer any authority over them, or hold upon them. Nay, in a little time, they will come to flatter themselves that God will be as weakly forgiving as we are. And no error can be more fatal, than to imagine, that with him mere confession will supply the place of reformation.

Another occasion, on which persons are very apt to think violation of truth excusable in themselves and their friends, though they exclaim against it vehemently when they suffer by it, is in speaking ill of those, who have injured or provoked them. Aspersing others in cool blood, is condemned as universally as it is practised. But when any one hath

been the aggressor; and so, we conceive, deserved it from us; (and truly a very trifling, or even imaginary offence, will deserve, in the estimation of some people, the bitterest returns;) then we are strangely inclined to load them with whatever accusations we can hope to get believed, and sometimes more. Not only what we have no sufficient cause to think true, but what we have abundant cause to think false, we are tempted to say of them at such times; and fancy it is almost a justification of us, if we can plead, that we did not begin. Yet perhaps we did, if the case were fairly stated. But supposing the contrary: is there any pretence for our turning liars and slanderers, because others are inconsiderately, or even designedly injurious? May not we thus easily become as bad or worse than they? Is it not the sure method of exasperating, and perpetuating, enmity? And why should we not rather acquire the approbation of God and of our own hearts, the esteem of the world and of our adversaries themselves, by treating their reputations with generous tenderness?

But be it ever so wrong to speak ill of others falsely, yet speaking a little too well of any one, we may imagine, can never be much blamed: an act of so much good nature may seem almost a meritorious transgression. But, in reality, besides that doing this by no means proceeds always from benevolence, but too commonly from interested views, or even malicious purposes; let it proceed from what it will, it often produces most lamentable bad effects. By raising persons characters, or magnifying their circumstances beyond truth, you may induce others to enter into engagements with them, or to repose confidences in them, that may prove very fatal: you may occasion their being employed in affairs of import-

ance, to which they are unequal; whence dreadful mischiefs have come: you may, by exalting them, be the means of disappointing, depressing, ruining their much worthier rivals: and you contribute to annihilate that distinction between one man and another, which public welfare, no less than private justice, requires to be kept up. Therefore, though, doubtless, we ought to be chiefly cautious what harm we say of our neighbours; yet, in some cases especially, we ought to be very cautious too, what good we say of them, though still we should charitably hope and believe as much, as with any reason we can.

And as designedly giving people a better character to others than they merit, is not excusable; so neither is extolling to themselves their virtues or accomplishments beyond the due bounds, be it by gross flattery, or by refined; though pleas are urged for it, both as demanded by the rules of civility, (whereas indeed these rules are very consistent with those of sincerity) and as the way to make them become what they are told they are. Now, on the contrary, this is the way to make them think they need neither to amend nor improve; to fill their hearts with vanity, and their behaviour with insolence; to encourage them in their favourite follies and vices; and thus lead them into disesteem and wretchedness. The commendation which persons deserve should very seldom be given them fully to their faces: but giving them more, and persuading them they are already in rightful possession of that high character, which they should only be taught to aim at, and at most to hope for in due time, generally proceeds from weak fondness or interested baseness; and rarely intends, and scarce ever doth them any good.

Another case, in which the speaking of untruths

is considered in a light much too favourable by the parties, who fancy they find their account in it, is that of trade. For they alledge, that though, undoubtedly, it is very unhappy and very wrong; yet, in fact, falsehood hath prevailed in this part of human affairs to such a degree, that veracity cannot support itself: they must do as others do, or they must be ruined. Now indeed there is no question, but wicked people have thrown many difficulties in the way of such, as else would be honest. And *Woe unto them, by whom the offence,* for it is a dangerous one, *cometh**: who, making advantages of fraud, bring disadvantages on uprightness. But still the necessity of prevarication in order to thrive is merely a pretence, of bad persons originally, by which others have too easily suffered themselves to be deceived, and so adopted it. A *lying tongue* may carry some points: but will not *the lip of truth* gain ground of it upon the whole? Is it nothing, or is it not the greatest of all things, that we must love to deal with them, in whom we find that we can place confidence? It is both safer and easier. And thus, though they may have inconveniences to struggle through at first; yet, when once they have established a character, the benefits of it will be certain and durable. Doubtless many a fair trader hath failed: but then some accidental great loss, or want of skill, or of prudence, or diligence, or obliging behaviour, hath been the cause; and seldom, if ever, his integrity. The reputation of that, which cannot be secured without the reality, gives men great pre-eminence above their equals, nay, above their superiors, in other respects. But even were adhering to truth disadvantageous upon the balance of worldly consi-

* Matth. xviii. 7.

derations, yet surely it is far better to bear this inconvenience patiently, and make ourselves amends for it by greater industry and frugality, than to infringe a plain duty, and offend our Maker. Let falsehoods be ever so common and successful in all business, and perhaps peculiarly in some: this alters not our obligation. It may moderate our censures of others: but it cannot give a latitude to us in our own behaviour. *That which is altogether just shalt thou follow*, saith the Scripture*: and *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*†. Nay, to put one of the hardest cases, if any person, in selling me any thing, hath imposed upon me ever so much by falsehood: that doth not give me the least right to impose on another, even in the very same affair. I have been deceived: but this no more authorizes me to deceive the next person I deal with, than having been robbed authorizes me to assault and plunder the next man I meet. The frequency of frauds, and the temptations that arise from thence, are very strong reasons for adding great prudence to our innocence; for being much on our guard, in what professions we engage or continue, with whom we have transactions, to what employments we put out those, who are under our care: but they are no manner of reason, why we should look on the dealings of man with man only as a fair trial of unfair skill, and contribute to make the world worse, because it is so bad already.

One observation further I would make under this head, that, of the more importance the preservation of sincerity in business is, the more we ought to avoid inticing and almost forcing those, with whom we have commercial concerns, into insincerity, in order to satisfy and please us: we should allow them to make,

* Deut. xvi. 20. † Exod. xxiii. 2.

and to own they make, reasonable profits; we should yield to truth, when we have cause to think we hear it; and encourage it by favourable treatment, wherever we see it.

Another occasion, mentioned already, and deserving it again, on which too many reckon lies excusable, is, when they are told to entertain the company. The end being so innocent, and laudable, a small irregularity in the means, they hope, may surely be overlooked. But this entertainment is commonly given at the expence of more persons than one. It seldom fails, but somebody or other is misrepresented to his detriment or discredit. He is certainly injured. They who are misled to a wrong judgment about him, nay about any thing, may be injured by it not a little. The facetious person himself, who takes these liberties in conversation, whatever applause he may gain from the inconsiderate, must never expect any serious esteem, even from them: and, indeed, by trespassing against truth, on so slight an inducement as a jest, will bring himself into a temptation, as well as a suspicion, of making still freer with it, whenever that may serve a purpose of greater moment to him. The affectation therefore of being witty by spreading falsehoods is by no means an allowable vanity. Nor indeed can any way of raising our own reputation be at all defended, that is inconsistent with veracity.

Some appear to think it very pardonable, provided they say no harm of others, to say as much good as they please of themselves, true or false. For whom, they argue, doth that hurt? Why, if you are not believed, it will hurt you that say it, very much. And if you are, it may hurt those who hear it, or hear of it, still more. No one hath a right to put off himself, any more than another, for more than his value: and

he who attempts it knowingly, commits, as far as in him lies, a very base, and often very mischievous, fraud, probably indeed the world will detect him: but that proves only his folly, not his innocence.

Some again contrive a different, and astonishing method of imposing on mankind in this respect. They take a pride in saying, not good, but bad things of themselves, that are not true: profess vile opinions, which inwardly they do not believe: and pretend to have done profligate actions, for which they have not had the heart or the opportunity. For who can forbid them, they imagine, to treat their own characters as freely as they please? And indeed, if it was really their view to become by these means, objects of public scorn and abhorrence, they have fairly earned it, and one would wish them success. But their seeming unaccountable self-denial is rank ambition. They want to gain credit to wickedness and themselves at the same time: by representing their own lives and principles, as worse than they are, to make those of their disciples worse than they would be; and to place themselves at the head of this chosen band. An employment so diabolical in its plan, and so execrable in its effects, that every good and every wise person is bound to express the extreme detestation of it, which he cannot but feel.

These, I think, are the chief cases, in which one sort or another of persons are apt to reckon falsehood excusable. And if it be, on the contrary, so bad in the best of them, there is no need of shewing particularly, how abominable it must be, when deliberately employed in private or party contests, in supplanting and undermining, in prosecuting schemes of unwarrantable gain, in the service of revenge, malice, or envy, in the gratification of idle talkativeness, or of a

desire to seem knowing and important. In all these ways, and many more, liars are doing such dreadful mischief, and so continually, that were no other guilt imputable to the *tongue*, well might St. James accuse it of *setting on fire the course of nature, and being set on fire of Hell**.

But in order to apprehend rightly the full extent of this sin, it must be carefully observed, that not only if we affirm any thing which we think to be false, but if we affirm it without cause to think it true, we are still deceivers: or though we have cause to think it true, yet if we affirm it more positively, than we have cause; declaring ourselves to know certainly what we only believe, or to believe firmly what we only suspect and guess, the case is but little mended: that not only gross falsities, but more refined ones, artful quibbles and mental evasions, dark intimations and hints, not asserting, but insinuating to others, what at least we doubt within ourselves, all come under the same condemnation: nay, that sometimes an affected silence, and at others truth itself, told imperfectly and insidiously may deeply partake of the guilt of a lie. And lastly, it must be remembered, that, besides the falsehood of asserting what we do not believe, or doing things equivalent, there is another sort, often full as bad, of promising what we do not intend, or do not afterwards take care to perform: and that every lesser degree of expectation given, if it be insincerely given, or the fulfilling of it neglected, is an approach to the same sin.

From all these transgressions then let us conscientiously preserve ourselves: and for that end, avoid the ordinary occasions of them; compose our resentments, moderate our pursuits, mortify our vanity,

* James iii. 6.

check our fears, think before we speak, and keep silence rather than speak amiss: for, *in the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips, is wise* *. For the same end let us frequently reflect, that the comfort and agreeableness of conversation, the continuance of harmony and friendship amongst relations and acquaintance, amongst all indeed, who have concerns with one another, the regular and prosperous management of business, in short the tranquillity and good order of human society, depends on speaking truth: for the harm, that can be done, without departing from it, is comparatively insignificant. And therefore a liar, till he is found out, is the most mischievous of creatures: and, after he is found out, as he never fails to be, sooner or later, the most hated or the most despised.

Let us consider also, that sincerity is a duty no less plain than important: that our consciences require it of us, and reproach us for every breach of it: that the light of nature taught it the very heathens, though imperfectly, as it did every thing else: and that Scripture abounds with the strictest precepts of it, and strongest motives to it. There we learn, that *the devil is a liar*, and by means of lying *was a murderer from the beginning*; involved our whole race in sin and misery by one falsehood, and practises the same arts upon as many, as he can, to this day. Thus is he *the father of liars*: and, if we are such, *we are of our father the devil, and the lusts of our father we do* †. But the distinguished character of *God* is, that he *cannot lie* ‡: and we ought to be *holy, as he is holy* §. The blessed Jesus too is *the faithful and true witness* ‖, *who did no sin, neither was*

* Prov. x. 19. † John viii. 44. ‡ Tit. i. 2.
§ 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. ‖ Rev. ii. 14.

guile found in his mouth *; who *for this cause came into the world, that he should bear witness to the truth* †, and laid down his life to *redeem us from all iniquity* ‡. *Therefore* since *Christ our passover is sacrificed for us, let us keep the feast, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of truth and sincerity* §; *and speaking the truth in love, grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ* ‖. Again, *the Spirit of grace* ¶ is *the Spirit of truth* also, whose office is to *guide us into all truth* **. *Faith* and *truth* are amongst *his fruits* †† in those who are regenerated by him. And *the wisdom, which is from above, is without hypocrisy* ‡‡. *Lie not* therefore *one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him* §§. Nor doth this appear, in the Word of God, to be more our duty, than our interest in respect of both worlds. For in the present, *what man is he, that lusteth to live, and would fain see good days? Keep thy tongue from evil; and thy lips, that they speak no guile* ‖‖. And as to the next, *If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain* ¶¶. *All liars shall have their part in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone* ***. *And there shall in no wise enter into the new Jerusalem any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie* †††.

* 1 Pet. iii. 22.
† John xviii. 37.
‡ Tit. ii. 14.
§ 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.
‖ Epiph. iv. 15.
¶ Heb. x. 29.
** John xvi. 13.
†† Gal. v. 22. Eph. v. 9.
‡‡ James iii. 17.
§§ Col. iii. 9, 10.
‖‖ Ps. xxxiv. 12, 13.
¶¶ James i. 26.
*** Rev. xxi. 8.
††† Rev. xxi. 27.

SERMON IX.

LUKE XXI. 19.

In your patience possess ye your souls.

THE unpleasant things which befal us, in one part or another of this life, are so many; and the impressions, which they make upon us, are commonly so strong; that being affected by them no otherwise, than we ought, constitutes a large and difficult part of our duty: which therefore I shall endeavour to explain and recommend to you in several discourses. And as some things are immediately and necessarily uneasy to us, and some only by means of needless and unreasonable reflections and comparisons of our own state with what others are, or with what we might have been: I shall speak at present of bearing what we cannot but feel disagreeably, with composure, which is usually called patience; in the next place, I shall direct to the like behaviour under comparative misfortunes, which is generally expressed by the name of contentment; and after these moral obligations, which however need not and cannot well be altogether separated from those of piety, I shall proceed to lay before you more distinctly the religious ones, of resignation first, and then of thankfulness, under every affliction and seeming disadvantage.

Now the feelings unavoidably disagreeable to us,

and tempting us to impatience, are chiefly pain, sorrow, fear, and anger.

1. Pain: under which may be comprehended also sickness, restlessness, and languid lowness. These are often so grievous, by their degree, or continuance, or both; that we cannot fail from the very make of our nature, to suffer under them extremely: and stifling at such times all expressions of suffering, and earnest wishes of ease, would usually require too violent an effort to be lasting; or perhaps to be safe, even could we persist in it. Besides, these external marks of distress were certainly designed by providence to excite a proper degree of pity and assistance from those around us; which, without some powerful calls upon them, would frequently be withheld. And therefore we ought neither to condemn ourselves, nor others, who may possibly undergo far more than we imagine, for some strong expressions of present misery: nor think it a very heinous fault, if they now and then exceed the proper bounds. But still the more calm and moderate we are, the more we shall appear, if not to need, yet to deserve, both compassion and relief; and they will both be afforded us with more good-will and regard. Then further, all vehement complaints and immoderate significations of our wretchedness, heighten strangely our own sense of it; and thus either work us up into wild rage, or sink us down into spiritless dejection; and so make our case much worse than it was; when, alas, we have cause to seek out for every alleviation, great or small.

In acute torments, it is a very comfortable circumstance, if we can hope, that they will not be durable. Even a short time, indeed, will seem dreadfully long to us. But however, it must be a consolation in a

storm, that we are making towards a safe harbour within our view, though we seem to approach it slowly. And as the easing of pain is not only ease but delight; we should support ourselves by expecting it, as well as enjoy it when it comes.

In tedious disorders it may be very useful to look back now and then, and see how much we have gone through already: not in order to load our minds with the burthen of it a second time; but to learn, from what we have done already, what we can do more, if need be. And probably, we shall be able to do it with less difficulty hereafter, than we did before. For by degrees and proper care, both our minds and bodies become habituated to endure hardship quietly and cheerfully. It is a great proof and instance of the mercy of our Creator, that we are so framed. And we ought to make a faithful use of his goodness in this respect, as well as others.

But in order to acquiesce more patiently under our sufferings, we should look beyond the bitterness to the possible benefits of them. Our liableness to them may teach us caution and prudence in many parts of our conduct, in order to avoid them; may preserve us from follies destructive to our fortunes, our reputations, our health itself. For numbers have presumed so far upon their strength, as utterly to destroy it by irregularities, while the happy necessity of being discreet in the management of themselves hath carried on many who were very infirm, comfortably enough, to a good old age. Therefore, on the whole, perhaps bodily complaints may prove a security against greater inconveniences: and, were these less; yet only the difference between the one evil and the others ought to be computed, as clear loss to us. Nor is it only from follies, that men are

thus kept back, but frequently from sins also: from some, to which, if they would examine themselves, they might perceive they should have been exposed; and possibly from others, of which they have no suspicion. Firmness of constitution, vehemence of appetites and passions, flowing spirits, confidence of being able to do and to bear almost any thing, mislead men unaccountably in the conduct of life: make them forgetful of God and their latter end, prompt them to debauchery, intemperance, violence, injustice, to regard only present indulgence, and take the good things of this world for their portion. Better were it for such as resist not these temptations, if they had experienced in their stead the severest discipline of pain and sickness. These remind us of our dependence on him who made us; of the vanity of earthly enjoyments, of mortality and its consequences; of pitying and lessening the afflictions of our fellow-creatures; of shewing kindness, as we often need it. And the exercise of devotion towards God, and goodness to those around us, will so pleasingly employ our thoughts, so effectually sooth our minds, and reconcile us to ourselves and our condition, that we shall find the roughest attacks on our outward frame very supportable.

I shall only observe further under this head, that poverty and want, when they are so extreme as to bring on actual bodily sufferings, are to be placed to the account of pain: but such pain very seldom, if ever, arises to near the height which various diseases cause; and is much more constantly cured or mitigated by the care of charitable persons. Indigence, therefore, in this view, is very consistent with patience: and that in the other view, of reflection and comparison, it is equally compatible with contentment, shall be shewn you hereafter.

2. The next source of impatience before-mentioned is sorrow: which sometimes is mere sympathy with the calamities of others. But this does not commonly rise to the height of impatience: much oftener we are impatient with the wretched through our want of sympathy. There are those however, who are made so uneasy by the distresses which they see, that they will not bear the uneasiness of attending to them enough to give them due assistance. Now this excessive tenderness is an unhappy infirmity. It argues indeed somewhat of a right disposition: but perverted to a quite different purpose from what nature meant. And we should moderate the passive feeling, in order to exert the requisite active goodness; nor would this, on trial, be found very difficult.

But our grief is usually for things happening, which we apprehend to be evils to ourselves: and they may be of various sorts. The more considerable are, unkindness or loss of friends, diminutions of fortune, disappointments in worldly views, imputations on our characters, consciousness of imprudent or sinful behaviour. All these may be needlessly aggravated by the voluntary workings of our own minds; and so far belong to the head of discontent: but much of the concern, which they give, is unavoidable, and relates to the present subject.

Unkindness, where we had peculiar reason to expect the contrary, is one of the bitterest afflictions of life. We should labour to prevent it, by chusing the objects both of our love and esteem with great caution; and restrain our affection towards them within due bounds; instead of letting it run, or perhaps forcing it, into romantic extremes, which must end in something wrong; and we should most attentively endeavour to give no cause of dislike and alienation.

When it happens notwithstanding, that our most reasonable hopes are frustrated; change of opinion concerning the blameable party must naturally, if we are considerate, produce in us change of regard. And we must comfort ourselves, that the fault is not on our side; take care to continue still equally unreproachable; apply our thoughts to the duties of such other connections and ties, as remain upon us after this is weakened or dissolved; raise our hearts more to him, who always makes a gracious return; and then no ingratitude or infidelity, which we can experience on earth, will be able to overwhelm us.

Concern for the loss of our friends by death, in itself a sore trial, is aggravated sometimes by a confused imagination, as if death were a misfortune to them: whereas, if they were good and virtuous, it is in truth the greatest possible gain. It can therefore be only ourselves, that we bemoan with justice: and the damage to us may be very considerable: for which reason we should be solicitous, both to make all the improvement by our friends, and shew all the kindness to them that we can, whilst we have them; lest we should regret our negligence when it is too late. But, though the common fault is under-rating the value of those who are near and ought to be dear to us, yet present grief on losing them may possibly overdo it; and we may find ourselves able to go on without them, far more tolerably, than we imagined. Necessity will put us on exerting our powers: we shall seek for other helps and other comforts; and, in some degree at least, we shall find them. Or, supposing the accident to be as grievous, and as irreparable, as we apprehend it; yet this consolation is left, that the painful feeling of it will greatly diminish, however impossible we may at the time con-

ceive that to be. Indeed some appear unwilling that this should happen; and account it a duty to afflict themselves as much and as long as they can: whilst others go on to do it, though they profess to believe it a great sin. But, in reality, moderate concern, for a moderate season, is the useful dictate of nature: and immoderate concern is pardonable weakness; only it ought not to be wilfully indulged, wrought up to a great height and lengthened. Even if we affect to do these things, God has mercifully provided, in the unchangeable frame of our nature, that they should have an end: and we should instead of absurdly resisting him, co-operate with him by prudent reflection: not aim at insensibility: but only at such a rational degree of disengagement, as suits our condition: thus preparing by due behaviour under one stroke, to bear others which are to be expected. Persons on a journey quit many things, one after another, that are very agreeable to them: regret them all, but go forward however with composed minds. Now we are travellers through life: our friends are so too: our appointed stages are different: and we must learn to part.

Another cause of sorrow, loss of worldly substance, if it be so great as to bring on absolute painful want, hath been already considered: and if it doth no more than lower us in comparison with others, will be considered hereafter. But a few things may be observed here. We commonly urge it, as a great aggravation of our grief, if we not only are destitute of the conveniences, which wealthier persons enjoy, but have had them, and known them, and been deprived of them. Now surely on the whole, our condition is better for this, than if we had never had them, unless we make it worse by repining. Besides,

when we had them, did they make us extremely happy? In all likelihood far from it. And why then should foregoing them make us extremely miserable? Or how happy soever we were before, why should we not now be as easy as we can? Why indeed should we not provide for such accidents, by living in the midst of plenty, as if we had less of it, and doing good with the remainder? This would be the best use of it, were we ever so sure of keeping the whole; but hath a singular advantage, if we are to lose part. For then we shall be able afterwards to afford ourselves, perhaps nearly, if not quite, as much as we did before: the poor and the public will be the sufferers: and our concern for them will, instead of a selfish, be a virtuous one, and probably seldom excessive.

Disappointments in other worldly matters, failure of obtaining rank, power, favour, or loss of them after they are obtained, require scarce any other considerations to alleviate them than disappointments about wealth do. Only it is yet more uncertain, whether they, who seek them, shall be able to acquire them, or they, who acquire them, to retain them; and indeed, whether they, who do both, shall be the better or the worse for them; there is less reason to set our hearts upon them, and afflict ourselves at crosses in relation to them.

But perhaps our grief is, that our character in the world is impaired: and this we cannot tell how to bear. Yet the case may be, that it had been raised too high; and now is reduced only to what it should be. Surely we may bear this: it will teach us to know ourselves, keep us from aiming in any respect at things above us, and do us good many ways. Or if others think too lowly of us, yet provided they impute nothing bad to us, we may still be very easy.

We ourselves are ignorant of the worth of many: no wonder, if many be ignorant of ours. But supposing, that even downright ill is spoken of us; possibly it is because we have deserved just the contrary, because we have done our duty; and then what saith the Scripture? That we have cause to be sorrowful and dejected? No. Suffering for conscience sake is the very case, of which our Saviour saith in the text, *In your patience possess ye your souls.* Elsewhere he saith more. *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you—and say all manner of evil falsely against you for my name's sake: rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in Heaven**. Nay, he goes further still: *Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you*†. Not that a good reputation is in itself a blameable thing: but that when *all men,* particularly bad men, applaud any one highly, it is a ground for him to suspect himself of being too much *conformed to this world*‡. Or, if we are not defamed for having acted wisely and well, yet perhaps it is for something indifferent, that we are misrepresented; and we cannot be fairly accused of acting foolishly or wickedly. In this case, if we have not merit, we have innocence, to support us. And a great support it is, had we none else. But there will always be some in the world to do us justice. And, by the assistance of their friendship, indeed sooner or later without it, time will bring truth to light.

But possibly we think our behaviour hath been imprudent; and we have brought our sufferings on ourselves; and this causes our sorrow. Yet possibly also we may charge ourselves, as persons under affliction often do, either unjustly, or however much

* Matth. v. 11, 12. † Luke vi. 26. ‡ Rom. xii. 2.

too heavily. We did as well, perhaps, as the abilities, which God hath given us, permitted: and if so, we are not to blame. But if we were imprudent, let us grow prudent now; not torment ourselves fruitlessly, which would be fresh folly, but labour composedly to retrieve our false steps, as far as we can.

But it may be we grieve, not for indiscretions merely, but for sins. And this grief should certainly be the heaviest, which is usually the lightest. Yet, though in most persons it very much wants to be increased; in some it needs to be restrained and regulated. Self-reflection was given us, not barely to make us uneasy, but, by so doing, to amend us. If it rises to a higher degree, than contributes to our amendment, it is undergoing so much misery to no use. And if we carry it so far as to obstruct our amendment, it is adding greatly to our former guilt. Excess of concern either for the weak or the wicked things that we have done, may sink us into despondency, may drive us to intemperance, may incite us to yet more desperate courses. Therefore we should by no means be impatient with ourselves: (for it is commonly a mark of pride: we cannot bear the imagination of having acted wrong:) but should humbly acknowledge our faults and infirmities, beg wisdom and strength from God's Holy Spirit for the sake of his blessed Son; and in the faith of that assistance, without which we can do nothing, meekly and perseveringly labour to do better. By this method we shall learn self-knowledge and watchfulness; improve by our very falls in skill to stand, recover our character amongst men, acquire a lively hope of acceptance with God, and be at peace within.

3. The next cause of impatience, mentioned before, was fear. Now fear supposes the evil appre-

hended to be at some distance: perhaps the distance is so great, that we need not yet provide against it: and why should we disquiet ourselves before the time? But admitting the danger to be nearer: though doubtless this passion was wisely and kindly implanted in us by our Maker for precaution, yet we must keep it within bounds; else we shall be incapable of using effectual precaution; indeed shall contribute to bring on the very thing we dread. If we preserve our minds in a condition to take proper measures, it may never come near us; or though it do, may never fall upon us. Future bad events, as well as good, are extremely uncertain. Our pleasure is often diminished, by the latter uncertainty. Why should not our uneasiness be calmed by the former? Have not we often seen others, have not we often been ourselves, grievously frightened with the prospect of what after all did not happen? Let us oppose terror with hope. Or, if the agitation, produced by the conflict between the two, makes our case worse, as in some minds it seems to do; let us lay aside hope, and take it for granted that the misfortune we expect will befal us: yet it may continue a much less time, than we expect. Or if not, it may however be much more tolerable. Fear is a strange magnifier. People say, they are positive, they are certain, that they shall never be able to go through what is approaching. They are not certain, they cannot be certain before-hand. Human nature will endure much more, than we imagine. At least, surely God can strengthen us, if he will. And his Word declares, *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will, with the temptation also, make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it**. Most men have found, and the

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

timorous will own it, that they have frequently suffered a great deal more by the apprehension of heavy strokes, than by the infliction. Why should we not learn then to moderate our apprehensions? Look steadily at the thing feared: examine the worst of it: but observe also the mitigations and remedies, and apply them. They are various in themselves, and useful in various degrees, according to the difference of circumstances: and the particulars cannot be reckoned up here. Only, do nothing wicked by way of prevention; for sin is worse than any temporal suffering. Set not your thoughts wholly on guarding against one danger; for there are many: nor against them all; for your attention ought to be divided amongst the several duties of life, that none may be neglected. Want not to be securer, than the state, in which we live, will allow: but let it suffice you, that the world is governed by the providence of God. Pray to him, and cheerfully put your interests into his hands, and all will end well. *Be not afraid of sudden fear—when it cometh: for the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken*. The fear of the wicked shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted†. The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, shall be safe‡.*

These assurances hold good more especially with respect to one fear, that of death, which deserves to be mentioned separately. We should always live in the thought of it: but many live in the dread also; and dread it on occasions where there is not even the smallest hazard of it. And sometimes their very alarms, sometimes the useless and hurtful precautions, which they take in consequence of them,

* Prov. iii. 25, 26. † Prov. x. 24. ‡ Prov. xxix. 25.

hasten it. These things are evidently in a high degree unwise: and a moderate use of reason, one should think, might check them. But be we ever so prudent, it will come. And numbers are terrified with the great pain, which they fancy it must bring with it. But this, as far as ever we have room to judge from appearances, is quite a groundless imagination; and there are very few who have not undergone, perhaps many times over, more bodily sufferings already, than they will in the hour of their dissolution. Still were death to end our being, the view of it to good persons would be a melancholy one indeed. But, God be thanked, *our Saviour Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel**. Impenitent sinners, I own, instead of comfort, have only cause from hence for unspeakably worse terror. And strong warnings of it are kindly given them in Holy Writ. *Be not afraid of them, that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, fear him*†. Nor is there, in the whole creation, any cure for this fear, but repentance and faith, and Christian obedience to God's laws: and these are a perfect cure. For our blessed Redeemer hath condescended to die, that they who believe in him and keep his commandments may live in happiness for ever: or, to express it in the words of Scripture, *that, through death, he might destroy him, that had the power of death, that is, the devil: and deliver them, who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage*‡.

4. The last trial of our patience, of which I pro-

* 2 Tim. i. 10. † Luke xii. 4, 5. ‡ Heb. ii. 14, 15.

posed to speak, is anger. With ourselves we are seldom angry enough, when we do amiss: and yet we may be too angry at our own faults, as well as too much grieved for them. Of this latter excess I treated under the second head; and the observations and directions, there laid down, may without difficulty be applied here. I shall now, therefore, discourse only of anger against others: and that more briefly, because I have lately treated that subject at large. Take notice then of the following motives for moderating this passion. Impatience of pain, excess of sorrow and fear, hurt only or chiefly ourselves, with whom we have the best right to make free; and seldom provoke any one else to do us harm; but excess of anger injures others, which is a great sin: and excites them to revenge, which is a great folly in us. We have surely failings and sufferings enough besides; and need not add to them thus. But indeed, without looking so far, anger in its very nature is tormenting: and when immoderate or frequent, sours our tempers, imbitters our lives, wears out our frame, lowers our character, lessens our influence, thwarts our interests, multiplies our difficulties, hurries us into dangers, even of our lives, in more ways than one. Plainly therefore we are concerned, on many accounts, to restrain it within the limits of reason and religion, by every method in our power: by serious considerations of duty to him, who requires it of us, and of gratitude to him, who is so patient and long-suffering towards us; by cultivating good-will to our fellow-creatures, by reflecting on the frailty of human nature, on our own innumerable frailties and errors, in behaviour to others: which we doubtless must wish to have gently passed over by

them; and therefore ought to be gentle ourselves. We should endeavour by prudent and mild treatment of those with whom we are concerned, by discreet vigilance over them, by friendly instruction and admonitions given them, to prevent their acting wrongly by us: and, if they do, notwithstanding, we should consider calmly, and without exaggeration, the degree of the fault committed, hear and weigh their defences and excuses, make use of cool expostulations to convince and reform them; and employ others in this good work, who may be more likely to do it well and successfully, if we have any cause to distrust our own temper or weight. And amongst other things we should frequently recollect, how happy and pleased with ourselves we have been afterwards, when we have resisted and overcome incitements to unreasonable rage, and how miserable and full of fruitless remorse, when we have yielded to them.

But besides the directions more peculiarly appropriated to each of the four temptations to be impatient, which I have mentioned, there are some scarcely touched upon yet, which in a good measure belong to them all. One is, to think often how possible it is, that more or fewer of these temptations may sooner or later come to our share. Were we indeed to imagine it more probable than it is, that many of them would, this might sink our spirits, and weaken our strength; our *hearts failing us for fear, and for looking after those things, which* perhaps, *are* not *coming**. But previously considering in a reasonable manner, to what sort of accidents we are liable, will guard us against the vain imagination of being exempt from evil, prevent us from being alarmed, sur-

* Luke xxi. 26.

prised, and cast down by it, *as though some strange thing happened unto us**, and gradually reconcile us to the lot of humanity: we shall be ready and prepared for whatever may fall out; recollect immediately that no trial hath overtaken us, *but such as is common to men*†; and *resist* all emotions of immoderate vehemence, *knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren that are in the world*‡. Another direction is, that under a long continuance of pain, or grief, or fear, or provocations to anger, if we find that by the mere use of arguments from prudence, virtue, or religion, we cannot get the better of them, but are in danger of being overcome; we should try the effect of turning our attention from them for the present, as well as we are able, to other subjects: undoubtedly to the best and most valuable that we can; but to any, that are innocent, rather than grow fretful, or despond. Only we must never take refuge in trifles out of choice; but consider it as a mark of weakness, and cause of shame, that we are driven to them: and we must beware, that they never banish pious and serious thoughts out of our minds, or depreciate them in our esteem.

Every one of these rules, I trust, may assist us, more or less, to *run with patience, the race that is set before us*§, as the Apostle exhorts. But the great assistance will be what in the next words he directs, *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross—and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*‖. His first disciples were enabled to bear pain, sorrow, fear, provocation, each of them in the highest degree, from their cruel persecutors,

* 1 Pet. iv. 12. † 1 Cor. x. 13. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 9.
§ Heb. xii. 1. ‖ Ver. 2.

by *considering him, that endured such contradiction of sinners, lest they should be wearied and faint in their minds* *. Well then may we, who have so much less to undergo, *possess our souls in patience* amidst it all. Indeed without patience we cannot, in the lowest sense, *possess our souls;* be masters of ourselves, and enjoy even the present being, which God hath given us; the best things will be tasteless, most things bitter; we shall torment ourselves, and repine against him. But if we watch over our hearts, and apply to God, he will *strengthen us with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness* †: *tribulation will work patience: and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope will not make us ashamed* ‡. For not only shall we possess our souls in comfort here, but if, as St. James enjoins, we *let patience have her perfect work* §, we shall secure the possession of endless felicity hereafter. For God will give *to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life* ‖. Therefore, *having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience* ¶: *and the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ* **. *For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise* ††.

* Heb. xii. 3. † Col. i. 11. ‡ Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. § James i. 4.
‖ Rom. ii. 7. ¶ Luke viii. 15. ** 2 Thess. iii. 5. †† Heb. x. 36.

SERMON X.

PHIL. IV. 11.

—I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

You have lately been exhorted to the duty of patience: which consists in bearing well such things, as immediately and necessarily give uneasiness: and now I proceed to that of contentment under such, as disturb us only on reflection and comparison. One should think, that they who need not suffer any thing, would not; yet very often such, as feel no positive evil, that is worth naming, are very far from being at ease. Multitudes are dissatisfied, and some extremely miserable, with very little other cause for it, than the unreasonable workings of their own minds. Instead of contriving to be as happy as they can in their condition, which is plainly the wise part, they set themselves to find out, why they should be wretched in it, and accordingly become so. Were they only to desire with moderation any proper good thing, which they have not, or endeavour with moderation to obtain it, this would be always void of blame, often worthy of praise: they would be pleased, perhaps improved also, if they succeeded; and composed, though they failed. But vain man extends his wishes and his claims far beyond these bounds: and will enjoy no peace within, because he is not, in this or that respect, what he might have been, or what others are. §

But suppose he were all that he wishes, how doth he know, that he should not quickly wish for more, with the same tormenting eagerness, or that his wishes would ever end? For there would be just the same ground for new ones. His complaint at present is, not that he positively suffers any thing, but that he wants something. Now something is, and must be always, wanting to finite beings, be they raised ever so high: else they would be infinite. The fallen angels were unspeakably above human rank; yet they felt a deficiency, and absurdly repined at it: Heaven was not good enough for them, and so they were cast down to Hell. Men imagine, that were they but in such or such a state, they should never be tempted to think of any thing more. But this is only a sign, that they do not know themselves. In proportion as their situation was raised, their prospect would be enlarged: and they would long to be masters of all within their view. Success would encourage them to hope for greater success yet: and, besides, they would be disappointed in the felicity they promised themselves from what they have got; but instead of learning from thence, in what real felicity lies, would go on to seek for it in something else; and be at least as remote from it, as they were before. We see this perpetually, or with the smallest attention may see it, in the case of others: and it is astonishing partiality, that we cannot believe it would be our own. Nay, perhaps we see it is our own case, as far as we have advanced hitherto: and yet are weak enough to imagine it would be quite otherwise, could we but advance a few steps more: whereas in truth, he that is uneasy merely because he hath not all he would, never will be easy till he grows wiser.

Happily we none of us disquiet ourselves about

every thing that we have not. If we did, how blameable and how pitiable should we be! We all know number of things, that we should be very glad of, and yet can bear the want of them very well: and why not the want of others as well? What is impossible, it would be madness to covet. What we cannot obtain, is the same in relation to us, as if it were impossible in itself. Therefore we should never think of it. And what is very unlikely to be got, should scarcely be more minded, than if we knew that absolutely we could not get it. But you will say, how shall we put these things out of our minds? Turn them to something else. Recollect the comforts that you have, and rejoice in them. All of us have many such. Reasonably good health, wholesome food and refreshing sleep, a provision of the other necessaries of life, a share of its conveniences, acquaintance that are agreeable to us, friends that wish us well, and, upon occasion, would shew it, opportunities of easy and cheerful conversation, the good opinion and esteem of those about us, the very sight of the sun and the view of the face of nature, are things, every one of them designed and fitted to give us pleasure, if we would but be so kind to ourselves as to take it. Consciousness, that through the grace of God's holy Spirit we mean, and on the whole behave well, persuasion that, through the merits of his blessed Son, we are interested in his favour, hopes that his fatherly providence will watch over us here, and his goodness make us perfectly happy hereafter, these are blessings of a higher order, which we all may have; and as no one ought to be, or with reason can be, content without them, so every one surely may well be content with them; and think himself enough distinguished by such mercies, let him have ever so few advantages

And we should accustom ourselves to look, more than we do, on the bright side of our condition; not in order to grow vain and contemptuous upon it, which is the common use that is made of contemplating it, but to enjoy it with humble complacency. We should place a just value on all our greater comforts: and fetch out of the very least as much as they will afford us. Applying our minds to become easy and satisfied is evidently right: but why should we reason ourselves into being miserable, and resolve not to be the better for any thing, because we have not this or that?

Perhaps indeed you will allow, that grieving merely because you are not possessed of things, that are plainly above you, is very blameable; and will allege that you are not guilty of it; that you are willing to be inferior both to what you might have been, and to what many others are. But still you will plead, that such and such have no title to pre-eminence over you, or even equality with you: yet they have obtained it, and that you cannot bear. Now consider; these very persons, who give you dissatisfaction and envy, if you knew all, you might see cause to pity. You know not how little delight they may have in all their seeming advantages: or what sufferings they may on one account or another undergo; nay, how dearly they may pay for what you imagine to be a principal part of their felicity. For usually there are great deductions to be made from all appearances of prosperity amongst men; and often they, whose outward shew is most admired, are the most wretched within. Indeed, though doubtless there are many, with whom you would wish to change some things, there are few, if any, with whom you would consent to an intire change; and take their person, their age, their health,

their temper, their situation, their employment, their connections, their vexations, their hazards, their circumstances of all kinds, for yours. And if you scarce know, with whose condition upon the whole you would be better pleased; why are you not pleased with your own? For surely, it would be too unreasonable to desire, that you should pick and chuse from each only what you like, and unite it all in yourself.

But further, your condition is just what it is, let that of others be what it will: supposing they enjoy more, or suffer less, than you; still your enjoyments and sufferings are just the same, as if this were quite the reverse. And why do you set yourself to think the contrary, and disquiet yourself with a false imagination? There will, and there must be inequalities in the world. Nothing can prevent it, but continual miracles: and if it were prevented, and we were all on a level, we should probably, on the whole, have great cause to be sorry. Think then: why is it harder, that you should be inferior to others, than that they should be inferior to you? Would your state be ever the better, if theirs were made worse? Would you wish theirs to be worse, that you might have comfort in the comparison? If you would, yours is already much better than you deserve. Impatience and excessive agitation, under great pain, sorrow, fear, provocation, is at some times, and in some degree, hardly possible to be avoided, and therefore excusable. But the discontent of those, who have no such evils to complain of, is of their own choice: they might be easy if they would. And resolving not to be so, because they imagine others are more so than they, is not only unreasonableness, but ill-will and malice. The torment which they

feel, is a guilty one: it punishes them justly here; and they will be liable, for indulging so unchristian, so inhuman, a temper, instead of *rejoicing with them that rejoice* *, to far severer punishments hereafter.

But you will say perhaps, that your inferiority in this or that particular makes you despised: and who can bear contempt? But indeed scarce any one is despised for being what he is, and cannot help being, but only for affecting to be what he should not or cannot be. The lowest in all respects may be useful; and, if they behave properly, will be valued according to their usefulness. At least they can never deserve contempt: and the consciousness that they do not, will enable them to slight and overlook the little they may meet with: and indeed often to despise those who despise them. For worldly advantages only serve to lessen the esteem of such as use them ill: and some of the greatest, and, in their own and the vulgar opinion, the most accomplished, are often the farthest of all people from being truly respectable.

But probably you will plead further, that the persons, who excite your dissatisfaction, are vicious, or at least unworthy of their pre-eminences: and they will do harm with them, or however little or no good. Now in all likelihood you think them worse, or less worthy than they are: they may have good qualities with their faults, though you are unwilling to see them; and you certainly have faults with your good qualities, though you are desirous to overlook them: and how much better you are upon the whole than they, it may perhaps be neither easy nor safe for you to judge. But be they ever so bad, Providence may over-rule them, and keep them from executing their bad purposes, or may use them for its instruments, to correct the faults of others that are as bad, or exercise

* Rom. xii. 15.

the virtues of others, who are much better; possibly to correct and exercise you. Therefore do not fail under the trial. But is this fear of their doing harm the real motive of your discontent, or only an excuse for it to others and yourself?

You will probably reply, that however that be, had you had such and such advantages, which you have not, you would have done a great deal of good. But perhaps others will do it in your stead: and you may if you will, and you certainly should, take pleasure in it, by whomsoever done, and not repine at it. But it may be you would not have been able to do the good you fancy, and would only have brought disquiet on yourself by attempting it. Nay, it may be, you would not have attempted it: for difference of circumstances makes a great difference in the ways of thinking of the same persons; and we often do not prove to be what we fully imagined we should.

Still, at least, you will say, what you wish for would make you very happy: and therefore you regret the want of it. But regret it as little as possible, and be as happy as you can without it. Perhaps you would be scarcely, perhaps not at all, happier than you are. Multitudes find this to be true every day: they obtain what they desire; and very soon after, if not instantly, perceive that their condition is never the better for it. But they are thought happy, you will say, and admired or envied: and that alone is a desirable thing. Now surely it is very poor comfort, indeed it is rather an aggravation of sorrow, when we feel our condition wretched or insipid, to have it thought joyful and desirable: to be congratulated on our situation, when we know it is a subject of condolance; and so to have pity from none, but the ill will of many, to load us with more uneasiness,

when we inwardly groan under too much already. The wise king saith, *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous: but who can stand before envy**? Our desire of producing it in others is immoral; for it is a desire of giving them pain: and the imprudence fully equals the guilt. For all pre-eminences, especially when accompanied with ostentation of them, or too visible complacence in them, to which all who have them are extremely subject, stir up malignity in the observers of them: who often find means to make those very miserable, whom they would have let alone, and suffered to go on quietly, if they had not been provoked by thinking them over-happy.

But supposing the advantages, which you pine for, whatever they be, would raise no malice against you, but only admiration of you: how often hath that, nay even the shadow of it, mere flattery, made persons vain and indiscreet, misled them into great errors, and plunged them into grievous misery.

Indeed, without either, all sorts of superiority carry their dangers along with them. If you were placed in a higher station, perhaps you would be at a loss how to behave in it; for there are many difficulties in all such; you would be found by others, you would find yourself, in one respect or another, unequal to it: or if not, it might tempt you to pride and abuse of power. If you were possessed of great wealth, it might lead you, for it hath led many, either to endless desires of still more; or to expensiveness and thoughtless extravagance, that would end in distress; or to sensuality and vicious indulgences, or to contemptible indolence and uselessness. Accomplishments of persons expose the possessors of them to immoderate self-esteem, to neglect of useful

* Prov. xxvii. 4.

attainments, to dissipation of their time, often in the unfittest company, to improper freedoms, to great hazards of their reputation and their innocence. Health and strength encourage men to venture upon irregularities, that prove ruinous to both, and to their fortunes at the same time; whilst they, whom infirmity obliges to be careful, prolong their days in comfort. Strength of genius, and extent of knowledge, often bewilder persons in fruitless researches, or prompt them to dangerous and hurtful singularities of opinion: quickness of parts and agreeableness in conversation, frequently betray them into grievous imprudences of various kinds, contrary to their own interest, to the peace of those around them, to piety, morals; and common decency.

But whatever may happen to others, you think you should enjoy all the benefits of these pre-eminences, and avoid all the evils incident to them. But why do you think so? You are just of the same make with the rest of mankind, and liable to all their frailties. Your confidence in yourself is a mark, not of ability, but of weakness and ignorance in a point of the greatest consequence. If you were but humbler, you would be much safer: and one material source of safety would be, content. For discontent brings people into mischiefs innumerable. It is a painful state in itself: preys upon the spirits, deadens the sense of every enjoyment in life, sours the temper, and produces great wickedness, as well as misery.

Displeasure with their own condition tempts many to aim at bettering it unlawfully, by force or fraud: and dreadful must the uneasiness be, which can drive them to a method of relief so evidently criminal. For however some may pretend they cannot see what right others have to enjoy so much more of the world

than themselves; yet let but any one, who hath less enjoyment of it, apply this reasoning to them, and act upon it, then they can perceive exceeding plainly, that his dislike of his own circumstances in any respect, is no manner of reason, or excuse, for his using other than honest means to mend them. For why should their property, their character, their quiet, suffer, because he is uneasy? And yet, what dreadful havock is there often made of all these from no better a motive! The kings and princes of the earth ravage nations, murder and distress millions; the powerful and wealthy, of lower degree, oppress and injure their fellow-creatures in more ways, than can be reckoned up, merely to obtain advantages, perhaps to which they have no title, certainly which they of all men least need, solely because they cannot rest without them; though at the same time they have no satisfaction, worth naming, from them. And in lower life, what numbers are there, who disturb their neighbours, to a great extent sometimes, and put things in a ferment all around them, only to carry some point, which possibly they ought not to carry, or which is of little use to them; nay, it may be, only to grieve some innocent object of their resentment, or to find any employment, rather than none, which may divert for a time, the inward chagrin, that devours them! So baneful are the fruits of discontent.

But when it is not carried so far, it is often very blameable: as when it incites men to importune and teaze others for favours, to which they have no sufficient pretensions; which is giving them trouble, sometimes a great deal, without any right to do it. And then the next step usually is, complaining, and being angry, and wanting to be revenged on such, as

have not done every thing for us that we wanted; though possibly they have done more than we care to own: or they know or find they cannot do what we wish, or are no way obliged to it, or have obligations to the contrary; as they easily may, of more kinds than one.

But even supposing we strive to keep our discontent to ourselves, yet if it rise within us to envy against others, this is a great sin. Barely indeed feeling our own disadvantages or disappointments, the more strongly on the view of another person's pre-eminence or success, is hardly avoidable, and may be nearly or quite innocent. Wishing our own condition were as good, as we take his to be, is not wishing ill to him, but only well to ourselves. But if we grieve, not that we do not enjoy what we would, but that he doth; or secretly rejoice in the sight, or the thought of any misfortune, that may bring him down lower and nearer to us: not only we shall be tempted to do ill, if we can, to one whom we wish ill to; but the wish itself is malice, unprovoked by any injury, (for his superiority to us is no injury;) the directly contrary disposition to that love and good will, which is, under all provocations, the great precept of humanity and of the Gospel.

Nay further, though we feel no malevolence at all against any one else, yet if the comparative disadvantages of our condition fill us with emotion and inward agitation, we are still in a wrong state of mind. It may seem perhaps, that our desire of any thing, apprehended to be good, must be strong, in proportion as we apprehend it to be a great good. But in reality, we have no desire at all for things that are quite above us; partly, to be sure, because we have no distinct notions of them; but partly also,

because we look on them as not belonging to us. Now would we but consider whatever we certainly cannot have, in the same light, and whatever we probably cannot have, in nearly the same, it would save us great uneasiness and guilt. The condition of many, who are much discontented about it, is in truth almost as good as this world admits; for it doth not admit any high happiness: and what can they get then by disquieting themselves that it is not better? moderate desires will excite reasonable endeavours to mend it, if there appears room: and immoderate ones will only add vexation. Sometimes the vehemence of our pursuit is the very cause that we miss our aim. And were it always the likeliest way to success, yet when disappointments happen, as they will frequently happen, it must aggravate the sorrow of them very greatly. Nay, mere delays may give eager spirits much more pain before they attain their ends, than the attainment will ever give them pleasure afterwards. For every one experiences what yet no one will believe, against the next time, that the largest increase of worldly advantages is commonly little or no increase, but often a diminution, of self-enjoyment: though indeed were this otherwise, bringing down our wishes to reason is so much the surer and more practicable method of being easy, than bringing every thing to yield to our wishes, that it scarce needs the further recommendation of being the more virtuous method also.

Still, paying some attention to our wordly interests, is a requisite part of wisdom: and it may be very blameable, not to stretch out our hand and take what Providence offers. But to covet with earnestness, and pursue with impetuosity, an object that seems to fly from us, when God alone knows what it may prove,

if we should overtake it, is generally, if not universally, presumptuous and rash. Yet this is the course that we commonly take. Whatever we see others follow, we follow too, just as fast, without asking ourselves why; encourage our wild fancies, instead of checking them; fill our hearts with imaginary wants, and become as eager for multitudes of things one after another, all which we might do very well without, as if the whole felicity of our being consisted in them. If men allow themselves in such behaviour, all that success can do for them, is to engage them still deeper in the same folly. For these cravings have no end, and therefore should be curbed and quieted in the beginning.

But though men are not vehemently agitated by discontent, yet if they are dejected and sunk by it, mourn over the disadvantages of their condition, and live in a state of affliction, be it ever so calm affliction, on account of them, even this is by no means right. It may indeed sometimes be in a great measure, mere bodily disease: or it may, when the degree of it is low, be the fault of one who is, on the whole, virtuous and good. But still it shews an undue attachment to the world, yet unfits persons at the same time both for the comforts to be enjoyed, and the duties to be done in it. If indulged to any considerable length, it may disorder not only the temper, but the understanding. And to strange lengths it sometimes runs in people, of whom one must think, that if they have cause to lament, it is hard to say, who hath cause to be satisfied.

Or suppose the various disadvantages of men to be as great as they think them; yet happiness doth not arise from outward circumstances, or the accomplishments usually admired: else how unspeakably

happy would the rich and great, the learned and ingenious, the beautiful and gay be, who all, at times, confess themselves to be far from it; and how miserable the rest of mankind, who, God be thanked, relish their being very comfortably! Every state hath not only its inconveniences, but its consolations: and the discontented would see this, if they did not perversely look solely at the former in their own case, and the latter in that of others: magnify what they themselves want, and under-rate what they have; over-value what their neighbours enjoy, and forget to make allowance for what perhaps they suffer. We know the worst of the condition we are in: but what evils belong to that which we wish to be in, we know not. Besides, every one cannot have every thing, that he desires, and where is the greater hardship, that we should fail of it, than that others should: Many appear or succeed better, it may be: but many also not near so well. Would they have cause to be wretched, were they in our circumstances? If not, why have we?

But further yet: perhaps our disadvantages proceed from ourselves: possibly it is our virtue and our honour that keeps us back from what we long for: and surely, the possession of good qualities ought to give us more pleasure, than any disappointments owing to them should give us pain. Or possibly some fault of ours produces what we complain of: our negligence or expensiveness brings us into straits, our imprudences create us difficulties, our ill temper makes things uneasy around us, our irregularities impair our health and spirits: correct these errors instead of repining at their consequences, and all will be well.

It may be you will say indeed, that you have endea-

turns, will prevail over us: but *through Christ: who strengtheneth us, we can do all things* *. To him we owe our deliverance *from the wrath to come* †: and well may we be easy with an inferior share of worldly advantages: for the best of us deserve none. From him proceeds all the good, that we think or do: and surely we have no title to greater abilities in any respect, than he bestows on us. On him depend our hopes of future happiness: and the lowest place in it is too high for us. Yet we know not how far we may advance in spiritual attainments by modest perseverance. We may be enabled in time to out-do both ourselves and others, and be rewarded accordingly. But however that proves, it may abundantly suffice us all, that we shall *make our calling and election sure* ‡, and *enter into* some degree of *the joy of our Lord* §, in return for our faithful improvement of the talents committed to us, be they more or fewer, if *in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, we keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience* ‖, though it be in very different proportions, *some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty* ¶.

* Phil. iv. 13. † Matth. iii. 7. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 10.
§ Matth. xxv. 21. ‖ Luke viii. 15. ¶ Matth. xiii. 8.

SERMON XI.

PSALM XXXIX. 10.

I became dumb, and opened not my mouth: for it was thy doing.

It would be our wisdom and our duty, though we had no knowledge of religion, to bear the sufferings of life with patience, and submit to the inequalities of it with contentment. I have therefore hitherto inforced upon you the practice of these two virtues, chiefly from prudential and moral considerations, though I could not altogether forbear adding some inducements of piety also. But these last are both so superior to the former, and so necessary in human circumstances, that I must now dwell upon them distinctly.

Pains of the body, and uneasiness of the mind, may, sometimes be so grievous, that, had we no invisible sovereign to obey, and nothing to hope or fear after death, it would be hard to persuade ourselves to continue in life. At least we should undergo in it a great deal of misery, with few and poor consolations. Those indeed, which I have mentioned to you, are in many cases of considerable use by themselves: in all cases they may be of service, when combined with reflections of a higher nature. And our groveling minds are often more affected with feeble reasons, that are level to them; than with strong ones, that seem above them: or however may be best quieted a

while by a previous use of the former, till they can be raised to an ability of applying the latter. And humanity requires, that even the weakest aid be called in: but at the same time, that the principal stress be laid on the firmest support; else what will be the consequence? only indeed what most of us in our turns have probably experienced. We have been told that grieving would not help us, without being told what would; and so have been left to grieve on. We have been told, that sooner or later our sufferings would abate, which is small satisfaction in the mean while; or that they would be short, because our lives are so, which is leaving us to be miserable, as long as we are any thing. We have been told perhaps, that pain is no evil, and virtue is its own reward in all circumstances, when we are actually feeling the contrary: or that others were as wretched as we, or even more so; as if that could make our wretchedness cease. We have been bid to turn our thoughts from our sorrows to amusements: when we could not, if we would; and possibly should have abhorred to do it, if we could. Sage maxims and counsels of various and contradictory sorts, have been urged upon us, which had no authority or weight to make their way into our hearts: but we have remained in the condition which poor Job expresses to his friends: *I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all**. Or though men have ever so few sufferings, yet, without religious views, they may have so few enjoyments, and those so low, that a rational soul must disdain them, and feel its existence to be insipid and unsatisfactory. Or, however content, upon force, to acquiesce after a sort in our own condition, we may still either be persuaded, that the general

* Job. xvi. 2.

state of things upon the whole is wrong and unhappy, or doubt so greatly whether it be right and good, that the world may appear very gloomy and comfortless to a benevolent mind.

If therefore we desire to pass through it with complacency, we must extend our thoughts further, like the Psalmist in the text; and consider ourselves, as in the hands of God: for then, whatever happens, or whatever is wanting, to us or to any one, we shall see cause to submit to it composedly, and placidly, without objecting, *I became dumb, and opened not my mouth: for it was Thy doing.*

The Creator of all things is evidently, as such, Lord of all things: and hath a right to place us in what station, and expose us to what accidents he pleases; provided the being, which he hath given us, be not, on the whole, without our fault, worse than not being. For *who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus**? *Is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own*†? he can have no need, no temptation to use us unjustly: and, without any, we never use one another so: which knowledge alone is enough to produce in us a considerable degree of dutiful submission. If what we dislike in our condition were the effect of mere chance or fatal necessity, we might rebel in our hearts against it. But a principle of yielding to the lawful authority of an Almighty Ruler is part of human nature. Our circumstances perhaps are disadvantageous, or even our sufferings great. But if we look diligently into our temper and behaviour, have we not deserved all that we undergo, have we not deserved much

* Rom. ix. 20. † Matth. xx. 15.

worse? And if so, surely we should say in our hearts, with poor penitent Eli, *it is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good**: and with Jeremiah, *wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord*†. Perhaps also, the uneasiness, which we feel, whether inflicted for our transgressions or not, is more than overbalanced by the comforts that we enjoy. Our impatience may lead us into great mistakes in this matter: but God is liable to none. Or if, at present, wretchedness preponderates, he can easily make us a compensation, either here or hereafter: nay, if justice requires it, he certainly will. And *it is good, that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord*‡. In the midst of heathen darkness indeed, there may to some have seemed cause of doubt, especially on trying occasions, whether the administration of things were just or not; and supposing it to be so on the whole, whether it was or could be so in regard of each particular person. Now these, the more love and zeal they had for what was right, the more they must be dissatisfied with what appeared to be wrong: and therefore might be excusable in a degree, if they murmured against the dispensations of Providence towards themselves, or others. Some again, impatient of the evils of this life, ignorant of the means of procuring strength to bear them, and perhaps also doubtful at best of another to reward them, might, without any heinous depravity, yield to the temptation of thinking themselves allowed or even called, by the author of their beings, to put a voluntary end to them, whenever they were oppressed

* 1 Sam. iii. 18. † Lam. iii. 39, 40. ‡ Lam. iii. 26.

by sufferings hard to support. But in the clearer light of our days, either of these dispositions would be unspeakably more criminal.

Yet, were we only to believe, that God will do us no wrong, our submission to his will, though it might well be full of the profoundest reverence, would not be accompanied with the highest degree of esteem. But happily he hath also shewn us great kindness. For every pleasure that we enjoy, every capacity of receiving pleasure that belongs to our inward or outward frame, proceeds from his bounty. And how do we commonly behave upon it? Yield ourselves up to his disposal with a chearful trust in him? No: repine and complain, that he hath not done more for us, or that he doth not continue to us all that we ever had. But every thing is more than we are intitled to. We have no property in any thing: we ourselves are his property. Our very being is not our own: He bestowed it, and whatever we possess in it, and that only during pleasure: he may allow us a few comforts, or mix with them as many afflictions as he will. *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil**? All that he granted, he may withdraw at any time: and our concern is only to say with Job, *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord*†. He might have made any one of us the very lowest of his creation: and if the meanest of the works of his hands hath a claim to more than he hath vouchsafed, it hath an equal claim to more without end: and if it is not bound to resignation at present, can never be bound to it in any situation at all.

But though the sovereignty of God is absolute, we know not that he ever uses it in an arbitrary manner.

* Job ii. 10. † Job i. 21.

The Scripture tells us in express terms, that he *doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men**. And to think, that he limits the happiness of the least happy of his creatures without a cause, would be entertaining a disrespectful notion of his glorious attributes. *Manifold* as *his works are*, yet *in wisdom hath he made them all*†, and *the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord*‡. The farther men see into whatever he hath done or appointed, the more evidence they discern of foresight and skill, of bounty and mercy: and therefore ought firmly to believe they take place, even where they see them not. Such and such things we are apt to imagine might have been contrived more for our particular advantage. Yet perhaps we mistake: and what we wish either could not have been at all, (for many things may be impossible, which we do not perceive to be so) or would not have been the better for us. Our insight into consequences reaches but a very little way. In multitudes of cases we are full as ignorant of what would be for our benefit, as children are of what would be for theirs, and ought therefore to acquiesce in the will and the knowledge of our heavenly Father, as we expect them to acquiesce in ours.

But supposing that granting every one of our desires would be an act of kindness to us: yet *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*§. Very often it is visible, that, if we succeed in our wishes, others must fail in theirs: were we to have this or that advantage, they must be under proportionable disadvantages. And why is it not as consistent with the wisdom and the goodness of God to regard their interests, as ours? Perhaps we de-

* Lam. iii. 33.
† Psalm civ. 24.
‡ Psalm xxxiii. 5.
§ Psalm cxlv. 9.

serve it no better, perhaps not so well. Or if we did, or if it appeared not who would be hurt by greater indulgence to us, it doth not follow, that no one would; and that no inconvenience to any part, or in any respect, would arise from it. In this wide world the connections of things are innumerable: and may be very important, where they are absolutely hidden from our view, who probably discern but an inconsiderable portion of them. Subordinations are necessary in every system of every kind. The low rank and helplessness of many creatures fits them for our use; our advantages proceed from their sufferings; from the very sufferings which we inflict on them; yet they are totally ignorant of this: and how know we, what advantages may, some way, though quite different and quite inconceivable to us, proceed from our low rank and our sufferings? And as God hath wisely and kindly made so many orders of beings beneath us; why may it not be as wisely and kindly, notwithstanding we are ignorant on what account, that he hath made us just such as we are, and no higher or happier?

But though, in all likelihood, we can see only a few of the reasons of God's ways, yet several we may see, at least in some measure. For instance: he governs the world by general laws. On some occasions indeed he hath openly departed from them, and wrought miracles: on many, we have cause to think he secretly restrains and varies them for gracious purposes, or just correction: but were he not to observe them in the ordinary course of things, we should neither know, what to expect, nor how to proceed. If solid bodies did not weigh downwards, if bodies in motion did not communicate their motion to others, if winds had not a strong force, if rain

was not carried about by them, if fire did not heat and consume, if sharp instruments did not cut, the whole frame of nature would be disordered, and stop. If what tends to destroy our lives or our healths did not give us pain, we should take no sufficient care to avoid it. If any one thing almost, that we know, were to fail of commonly producing its natural effect, very general mischiefs, or however inconveniences, would follow: and yet, if they are left to produce their effects, grievous distresses to particulars, from time to time, must be the consequence. Therefore we should learn to respect the regulations of Providence, though occasionally we suffer by them. We honour, if we are at all reasonable, whatever laws of our country we know to be for the common good, though often greatly opposite to our own private interest: and surely less honour cannot be due to the laws of Heaven.

He, who could make such a world as this, may doubtless have, throughout his conduct of it, wise and good ends in his view, of which we cannot possibly form any conception. Were God to question us, as once he did Job; *Where wast thou, when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding**: our answer must be, what one of his friends acknowledged, *we are of yesterday, and know nothing*†: or as the book of Wisdom expresses it more largely; *What man is he, that can know the counsel of God; or who can think, what the will of the Lord is? For the thoughts of mortal men are miserable, and our devices are but uncertain*‡. Indeed creatures of our own rank, only of abilities perhaps a little superior, lay schemes of which we should never have the least notion, and compass them by

* Job xxxviii. 4. † Job viii. 9. ‡ Wisd. ix. 13, 14.

methods which we should never suspect, if we were not told them. Now God hath not told us all his ways, and all the reasons of them. Therefore with respect to many things, we must apprehend him to say to us, as the blessed Jesus did to Peter: *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter**. If we observe with attention, and enquire with humility, we shall find, sooner or later, in various instances, even while we continue on this earth, that seeming evil is real good in some respect or other. But a future life will draw back the veil from multitudes of the divine dispensations, and shew us beauty and order, where nothing appeared to us but horror and confusion. Yet even then we must not expect to know the whole: nor are the highest angels capable of fathoming all the depths of the universal providence of *the only wise God*†.

Faith is the evidence of things not seen‡: and implicit faith is one of the first and greatest duties of creatures to their Creator. We pay it to men like ourselves every day: and contentedly trust our fortunes, our healths, our lives with them, in consequence of it; notwithstanding they may often mistake, nay sometimes mean us ill. Surely then, without a single murmur, without the least hesitation, we may trust every thing, trust body and soul with God. For are they wiser and better, are we wiser and better, than he? Are we not safer in his hands, than in our own? He doth not do all for us, that we wish. But perhaps we wish indiscreetly for what would be much harm to us. Or if not, we think it very fitting, that our servants and inferiors when we command them, should undergo a great deal for the accom-

* John xiii. 7. † Rom. xvi. 27. 1 Tim. i. 16. Jude, ver. 25.
‡ Heb. xi. 1.

plishment of our purposes; and that multitudes of persons, when required by authority, should risque every thing dear to them, for the general welfare: why is it not fitting then, that we in our turn, should both give up satisfactions, and bear uneasinesses, to serve the good purposes of God? We are willing, I hope, to suffer more than a little for our friends, for our country, for our prince: why should we not be as willing to suffer every thing for the sake of mankind, and the system of which we are part, when the Sovereign of all demands it? We see not indeed perhaps, in what manner our sufferings or our disadvantages benefit others, or make the general state of things better. But *here is the patience and the faith of the saints**. Thus they have the means of shewing patience in every situation, built on the faith, that all things are conducted well. So far they are conducted well for us, that in our lowest and most afflicted condition, when the face of God seems hid from us, his eye watches over us; and while his hand is heaviest upon us, it is leading us to our proper share of happiness. Therefore, as the Apostle exhorts, *be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*†. But all matters are conducted in the highest degree well for the whole: and doubting it is thinking ill of our heavenly Father; for which we can never have cause. Nothing can win upon him to do wrong, nothing deter him from doing right, nothing resist his power; nothing mislead his judgment, nothing escape his attention, who sees through the universe at once. He hath fixed the proper laws and limits for every part, and we have no claim to be exempted. Therefore when we feel ourselves inclined to object, to be

* Rev. xiii. 10. † Heb. xiii. 5.

moved with indignation, and *tear ourselves in our anger*, as Job's friends accuse him of doing, we should check our vehemence, as they check his, by asking, *shall the earth be forsaken for thee, and the rock be moved out of its place* * ? Shall the foundations, on which the great system of nature stands, and by which its good state is preserved, be shaken for the seeming, or the real, benefit of this or that person? If of any one, why not of every one: for what are we more than others? And then nothing can follow, but universal inconsistence and confusion.

Still the duty of submission to God's good pleasure doth not require from us insensibility; for we cannot be insensible, of what we undergo, or what we want, or what superior advantages others enjoy. It doth not forbid us to think the present state of things, were we not to look beyond it, irregular and disorderly; provided we look on it as part of a regular whole, that is worthy of its Author. For the afflictions and inequalities of this life are a strong argument for a future one. And though entertaining too low an opinion of the wisdom and goodness, which appears now in the administration of the world, may often proceed from a bad temper, and produce or strengthen impious opinions; yet some may undervalue or dislike beyond reason what they see, merely because they conceive they are bound to excite in their hearts the highest possible esteem of what they hope for: and these, though mistaken, may be in the highest degree religious. Again: thinking with complacency, how agreeable it would be to us, were Heaven to change our lot in this or that respect, or place us in the condition of this or that person; nay, wishing it were actually done, provided the wish be formed on the

* Job xviii. 4.

condition, that such were His will, who knows best: nay, though that condition be not always explicitly in our thoughts, yet if we are habitually disposed never absolutely to desire that may be, which God sees fit should not be, we are still within the bounds of innocence. Indeed the further we suffer our fancies and inclinations to carry us in this road, the more slippery ground we continually tread upon: but thus far we may advance, and not fall. In cases of positive sufferings we may take yet another step: may bemoan ourselves, though not complain of God; may express in our devotions what he knows we cannot but feel, and lay before him our natural cravings of relief. For thus David, after the fullest, and undoubtedly sincerest, professions of resignation, made in the text, immediately subjoins, *take away thy stroke from me: I am even consumed by means of thy heavy hand* *. Thus also good persons in all ages have sought and found ease by submissive applicaeations to the throne of mercy. And if sometimes expostulations have escaped them, which seem not submissive enough, their cooler thoughts have doubtless corrected them, and no failure can be entitled to a more favourable construction. But if our condition be a tolerably comfortable one or might be such, if we would let it: then we have much more need to lower and suppress our desires of further advantages, than to inflame them by turning them into prayers. Not that we sin, if we endeavour to raise ourselves into a still more agreeable situation, or if we intreat God to bless our endeavours, as far as he judges it convenient. Resignation is very different, not only from despondence, which rather implies dissatisfaction and distrust, but from indolence, which may be

* Psalm xxxix. 11.

totally destitute of any sentiment of piety. And though an indolent person can perhaps be more easily resigned, yet an active one can be more certain, whether he is so in reality, and from a principle of conscience. But the activity exerted by us, when in good circumstances, to improve them into better, should always be accompanied with peculiar moderation of desire: and if we may lawfully pray at all to be rich or great, or in any respect eminent and admired; we ought certainly to pray with far more earnestness, that we may have nothing that will endanger our piety or virtue: but may always be humble and contented, and pleased with whatever the distributing wisdom of the Most High allots us.

Indulging ourselves in the contrary dispositions, is disputing with God the government of his own world: and either denying him to be wise and good, or wishing that he were not, but would order things ill for the whole, that our share might be more to our mind. Now what a dreadful sort of spirit is this, and where can it end? Therefore let us be satisfied with the place which he hath assigned us, and bear quietly the burthens which he hath laid upon us. We often submit with very little reluctance to the treatment which we receive from unjust men: why should we not submit without any to the pleasure of a perfectly just God? Could he ever be partial in our favour, he might afterwards change his mind, and be partial against us, and so we never could be secure of any thing. But now *his righteousness standeth like the strong mountains*, which cannot be overturned; at the same time that *his judgments are like the great deep* *, which cannot be fathomed. *Clouds and darkness are round about him:* but *righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne* †.

* Psalm xxxvi. 6. † Psalm xcvii. 2.

Some persons, it may be, are tempted to repine not so much at any want of happiness or feeling of misery, which they experience themselves; as at the general quantity of wretchedness and prevalence of wickedness, which they observe in the world. *My feet were almost gone, my treadings had well nigh slipt. And why? I was grieved at the wicked, I do also see the ungodly in such prosperity* *. And indeed concern on this account seems not only on many occasions useful in human circumstances, but inseparable in human nature from benevolence and love of virtue. But this is only because our nature is imperfect. For God sees infinitely more bad things than we do, and feels an infinitely stronger disapprobation of them, considered in themselves. Yet they cause not the least diminution of his happiness. For he knows, that through the direction of his wise providence, they will be the means of the greatest good: and therefore we ought to believe it: and be influenced by that faith, as far as we are able. But many pretend, and perhaps imagine, that they are deeply concerned at the growth of crimes, and the discouragements and decay of goodness, when in truth their chief, if not only, sorrow is, that their party is not uppermost, or their friends have not succeeded; or such as they dislike, have: and were but these things otherwise, the world might be as bad or worse than it is, without their being in the least uneasy at it. Some, on the other hand, care very little, whether right or wrong behaviour prevails amongst men, and dignify their blameable indifference with the specious name of resignation. Now both these faults must be avoided. The cause, in which we are zealous, ought to be that of piety and virtue, and the good of our fellow-creatures: and for this we

* Psalm lxxiii. 2, 3.

should have all the zeal, that will excite us to such behaviour in support of it, as belongs to our station. But we must neither attempt any thing beyond proper bounds; nor, if our justest attempts prove unsuccessful, and appearances in any particular case, or in general, are ever so bad, must we either think ill of God; or worse of men, than they deserve; or give way to impatience, or despair, or immoderate grief; but meekly *commit ourselves*, and every thing, *to him that judgeth righteously* *. Before we perceive what the event of our endeavours will be, we may entertain hopes; but they must be conditional, *if the Lord will* †, not absolute; and moderate, not vehement. When we are disappointed, if our desires were such as we need not have formed, we may justly be expected to give them up intirely: if they were founded in our nature, some involuntary concern will be felt; and instead of being terrified at it, as heinous guilt, we should gently, yet studiously, check it, as mere weakness. But the notion, that we either ought or may allowably indulge ourselves in dissatisfaction or grief, is utterly to be rejected. And the sooner and the more completely we quiet every painful feeling, and bring our minds to a calm acquiescence in the good pleasure of God; the better we are, and the happier it will be for us.

Other motives to bear evil patiently and contentedly are to be sought for from different quarters, as the circumstances of the case require: are often hard to find: and when found, have often small weight and influence. But resignation to the will of our gracious heavenly Father, is one and the same inducement, that naturally presents itself to our thoughts; is equally suited to all occasions; and while it awes us

* 1 Pet. ii. 23. † James iv. 15.

with the consideration of his absolutely sovereign authority, soothes us with the assurance, that *though he cause grief, yet he will have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies* *. Again: resistance to the purposes of our fellow-creatures may frequently prevail: but reluctance against those of our Maker never can. Therefore sentiments of dutiful submission spare us the pain of unavailing inward struggles, lessen every suffering, prepare us for every trial. If we will not yield with meekness to the disposal of God, how shall we bear injuries from one another; how indeed shall we refrain from being injurious; when our interests and inclinations prompt us? The practice of self-denying duties, without leaning on Heaven for support, is too hard a task for human nature. But such as not only believe the precept, but have formed themselves to feel the impressions of resignation, are in proportion superior to all difficulties. Their spirits are calm; and instead of plunging rashly into deeper distresses and even guilt, as the impatient do, they find their way, if any one can be found, out of every perplexity. By excluding eager hopes and high desires of earthly good, this pious principle excludes also jealous envy, keen resentment, tormenting fears, bitter disappointments, and final dislike of every thing. He that gives himself up into the hands of God, with unfeigned approbation of the divine conduct in whatever may befall him, will act as he ought in all emergencies, with uprightness and alacrity, with courage and honour; will suffer with a composed and even temper; will thus give testimony to the efficacy of religion, and vindicate the dispensations of providence to mankind. Nor can it fail, but so dutiful a subject to the

* Lam. iii. 32.

King of all, so faithful a confessor, so ready a martyr, if need be, in his cause, will obtain from him the strongest consolation here, and the amplest recompence hereafter. Therefore, let us pray earnestly for this blessed disposition, and improve ourselves in it by continual exercises of rational devotion: stir up our faith and our love, when they languish: recover *our steps*, whenever *they had well-nigh slipped* *: *put our trust in the Lord, and be doing good: delight in him, and he shall give us our heart's desire: commit our way unto him, and he shall bring it to pass: bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day* †.

* Psalm lxxiii. 2. † Psalm xxxvii. 3—6.

SERMON XII.

EPH. V. 20.

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I HAVE endeavoured, in three discourses, to instruct you in the duties of patience, contentment, and resignation: each rising higher than the other in the scale of right disposition, and advancing further from mere virtue into the superior region of piety. Happy, in comparison of others, are such as possess these attainments in any good degree: but even they have another step to take; for *yet shew I unto you a more excellent way**. It is not sufficient, that we bear sufferings of every kind with all the composure, which our nature admits: that we reflect on the various disadvantages of our respective conditions without repining; that we yield ourselves up to the just and wise disposal of the sovereign Lord of the universe: we are bound also to feel gratitude and express thankfulness to our heavenly Father continually for whatever in the course of his providence befalls us; and this we are to perform, as disciples of his blessed Son and Saviour. Let us consider distinctly the several parts of this most sublime precept: for certainly higher we cannot go.

I. We are to *give thanks always to God.*

II. We are to do it *for all things.*

* 1 Cor. xii. 31.

III. We are to do it *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I. We are to give thanks always to God and the Father.

The different orders of sensible beings were created every one for such a degree of happiness, as God saw to be most for the good of the whole: and rational beings were created to confess and celebrate his bounty to themselves and the rest of the world. Giving glory is the due return for having experienced goodness. It is therefore necessarily expected from us by him, who *hath made all things for himself* *; and must require them to answer the end, for which they were formed. We are sensible it is extremely wrong and unworthy, when we fail of owning the favours, which we receive from each other. And what shocking baseness is it then to forget his liberality, who hath *given us life and breath and all things, richly to enjoy* †! For how inconsiderable is whatever any one of us can do for the person whom he loves best, compared to what God hath done for us all! Our very capacity of receiving pleasure from our fellow-creatures proceeds from our Creator, as well as every other source of joy, which we feel to spring up within ourselves. And we feel much less of both, than we might and ought. We are so taken up and disquieted, with imaginary or small misfortunes, with uneasiness and pains for the most part very supportable, with groundless or excessive discontents and resentments, with needless pursuits, and immoderate hopes and fears, that we suffer multitudes of satisfactions, which Providence brings perpetually in our way, to pass by us unperceived or unnoticed. Yet many of them we should find to be

* Prov. xvi. 4. † Acts xvii. 25. 1 Tim. vi. 17.

great blessings; for we frequently overlook the very greatest that we have: the means granted us by reason and Scripture, situated as we are in a land of light and liberty, of improving in religious knowledge, in rightness of heart and goodness of life; the delights of social, and in particular of domestic friendliness; the continual feasts, which mere health and strength afford, if they are enjoyed with cautious innocence, prudent activity, and a cheerful equality of temper. Inconsiderately throwing away, or supinely disregarding, such bountiful provisions for our well-being, is surely the most dreadful waste, of which we can be guilty. But even the lower benefits, entertainments, and amusements of life, even those of them in which all persons may share, such as the very opening of our eyes, and looking around, such as the use of every one of our senses, may give us, though singly but little matters, yet being incessantly within our reach, arise on the whole to a vast amount. We do receive a great deal of pleasure from them: and we might receive much more, if we would frame our minds to observe and be pleased with the several objects and occurrences, that present themselves to us almost every moment.

But unhappily even they, who imagine they are the most judiciously attentive to enjoy from what they like, or from every thing about them, all that they can, are very apt to consider but few things, if any, as matter of thankfulness to God. Yet evidently nothing which we have cause to think in any degree good, ought to escape being considered in this view. For he is the sole original fountain of good, of every sort of good: not only *the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort* *, with respect to our higher expectations;

* 2 Cor. i. 3.

but the *Giver of rain and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness**; who *openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire*, the very lowest desire of *every living thing*†. Now would we but reflect on our various enjoyments in this light; as marks and instances of the good-will and kindness of the great Lord of all; as presents, which he graciously condescends to make us; it would raise the worth and dignity of them inexpressibly; it would impress us with the strongest conviction of their guilt, who *when they know God, glorify him not as God, neither are thankful*‡; it would inspire us with a most pleasing love and reverence to him, preserve us very powerfully from sinning against him by the abuse of his own gifts; and support us under whatever we might suffer in this world, by the assurance that he, of whose bounty we have so large experience here, hath blessings infinitely superior in store for us hereafter.

Let us therefore stir up and cherish in our breasts, a habit of constant thankfulness to Heaven: bear always in our thoughts the value of those faculties and powers of body and mind with which we are endowed, of the health and ease which we enjoy or have enjoyed, and remember that *He it is who made us, and not we ourselves*§. Let us reckon over the manifold comforts, and accommodations of life, the relations and friends, the agreeable acquaintance, the fair esteem, of which we are possessed, and consider that all these are the donations of a kind Providence. Let us raise our views higher: contemplate the inestimable benefits of our redemption; of the precepts, the examples, the promises of holy writ; the instructions given us by God's ministers in public,

* Acts xiv. 17. † Psalm cxlv. 16.
‡ Rom. i. 21. § Psalm c. 2.

by good persons and good books in private; the freedom which we and all around us have of worshipping our Maker, according to our consciences. Let us recollect, at the same time, the security of our persons and properties from oppression in all other respects, as well as this: that the whole exercise of civil authority over us, is legal and mild; that no one *will* or can *harm us, if we are followers of that which is good**. Let us compare our own condition in these particulars, with that of the multitudes elsewhere, indeed of most men throughout the earth, who sit in darkness and bondage, temporal and spiritual. Yet even they have cause to praise God. For the most deficient in worldly advantages have many consolations, if they will attend to them properly: the most ignorant shall be accountable only in proportion to their means of knowledge, and the most faulty shall be judged with every due allowance to the propensities of their nature, and the prejudices of their education. But how much more liberal is our share of whatever *pertains unto life and godliness*†: and what pleasure should we take in paying suitable acknowledgments! *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be always praising thee*‡.

But besides being thankful to God, *always*, we ought,

II. To be thankful to him *for all things*.

That the gift of life, taking the whole of it together, is justly a ground of thanksgiving, we cannot question, without questioning also the goodness of the giver. Yet whether we are indeed thankful, and to what degree, for the sum total of it united, we should do well to examine ourselves. But the Apostle expressly enjoins us to be so for each part separately. Be it

* 1 Pet. iii. 13. † 2 Pet. i. 3. ‡ Psalm lxxxiv. 4.

ever so afflictive, we have deserved much worse: and therefore ought to bless our merciful Father, that the blow came no sooner, that it was no heavier, that it was repeated no oftener. But then, besides, the same Apostle hath told us, *that all things work together for good to them who love God**. We are extremely prone to think otherwise, when any unpleasing occurrence befalls us; and to say with good old Jacob, *All these things are against me*†. But as he found most unexpectedly, that the grievances, which he bemoaned, were the very instruments of his happiness throughout the remainder of his days: so have very many since, and so very possibly may we experience the like unforeseen connection. I have shewn you, in speaking on the subjects related to this, from what evils our sufferings or disadvantages often preserve us, what benefits they often procure us. Indeed we frequently acknowledge, that to such or such a misfortune or disappointment we are indebted for our escape from destructive dangers, or our attainment of most desirable blessings. But we might discern many more events of this nature, would we look for them: and we should believe there are such very commonly, when we cannot see them. It is an act of duty owing to him, whose power and wisdom can easily bring good out of evil: and an act of prudence, which we owe to ourselves, as the sure way of turning every gloomy appearance into a cheerful one.

And were our troubles and crosses never to end in augmenting our temporal welfare, yet they may and will, if it be not our own fault, contribute to a far greater felicity, our moral and spiritual improvement. Sometimes we cannot avoid perceiving their

* Rom. viii. 28. † Gen. xlii. 36.

medicinal and salutary tendency: often we might perceive it by the help of a little serious consideration: and they may be extremely requisite, when at the time we perceive it not. For both our outward dangers and our inward weaknesses are very commonly unseen by us: whence we imagine ourselves to be in perfect safety, while we are really in imminent hazard. But the Great Physician of our souls knows our true and whole state: and it is unspeakable goodness in him, to apply the remedies, be they ever so rough, which our case demands, and a due regimen observed on our part will render effectual. When a needful, but harsh operation is prescribed to be performed on us by one of our fellow-creatures, though we are sensible we must feel from it exquisite pain, yet we chuse to undergo it, we desire to have it completely gone through without sparing us; and even during the smart, we bless the skilful hand, that inflicts the wound. Surely then we should bear as willingly, at least, the *chastenings of the Lord,* and *neither faint* nor murmur *when we are rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son, whom he receiveth**.

The worldly advantages, that we have wished for in vain, might not only have failed to produce in us a due sense of gratitude towards God, which alone would have been heinous guilt, but might have tempted us to irregularities, to pride, to injurious behaviour, to a ruinous choice of the good things of this life for our portion: whereas the uneasinesses and sorrows, that we groan under, may secure us from vicious courses, may teach us humility and compassion, may raise our affections above earthly objects. *Before I was afflicted,* saith the Psalmist, *I went*

* Heb. xii. 5, 6.

*astray: but now I have kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes**. *No chastening for the present,* saith the Apostle, *seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterwards, it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them, which are exercised thereby*†. If *men be holden in cords of affliction,* saith Elihu in Job, *then God sheweth them their work, and their transgressions, that they have exceeded: he openeth their ear to discipline; and commandeth, that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasure*‡.

Whatever makes us better, will ordinarily make us happier even now. For our faults and follies are what usually bring on our troubles: and in that case amendment is the likeliest way to remove them, and prevent more. Or suppose it proves otherwise, mere consciousness of amendment will administer no small consolation. And as there is very commonly pitiable wretchedness hid under shewish prosperity, so there may be sweet tranquillity of mind under sore calamities. *In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, thy comforts have refreshed my soul*§. Innocence gives great joy in the midst of sufferings: why may not piety, superadded to innocence or to penitence, give greater? Few, alas, are qualified for such feelings; and therefore the mention of them may seem strange: but as they are perfectly rational, we may justly, on the authority of Scripture, believe God to excite and strengthen them in devout minds to such a degree, as to make them abundantly an over-balance to the heaviest pressures of this life.

* Psalm cxix. 67. 72.
† Heb. xii. 11.
‡ Job xxxvi. 8. 11.
§ Psalm xciv. 19.

Or if they be not, the Christian temper, formed and cultivated within us by the means of these pressures, will fit us for higher rewards in the life to come. So that indeed the burthens, which our Maker lays upon us, are intended by him, who *knoweth* our *frame*, and *whereof we are made* *, as a requisite preparation for our truest good: *that we may be strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; and give thanks unto the Father, who maketh us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light* †. Were we but influenced by this consideration as we ought, we should say to God with pleasing wonder, what Job saith by way of discontented expostulation. *What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him* thus; *that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him;* that thou shouldest *visit him every morning, and try him every moment* ‡?

But supposing the trials we undergo should not improve our virtues at all, yet they must be deemed a very severe exercise of them: and even were such exercise to impair some of them a little; provided it be not through undutiful misbehaviour under them, but merely from weakness, contrary to our wills and best endeavours, undoubtedly every single circumstance of our case will be equitably considered in our favour. It is true, our most laborious service hath no merit in it: but through the unmerited goodness of God, if we *endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ* §, we shall be plentifully recompensed by *the captain of our salvation* ‖. For, as St. Paul triumphantly expresses it, '*All things are for our sakes,* every dispensation of Providence is designed

* Psalm ciii. 14. † Col. i. 11, 12. ‡ Job vii. 17, 18.
§ 2 Tim. ii. 3. ‖ Heb. ii. 10.

to increase our future blessedness, *that the abundant grace may, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory**. Therefore let us, like him, as well as we can, *rejoice in tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed*†.

Still we are by no means to run, either wilfully or carelessly, into unnecessary troubles; or expose ourselves by indolence and neglect to unnecessary losses, failures, and disappointments: for under such we have no promise that Heaven will support us, or make us the least compensation for them. But when the hand of Providence brings them on, *God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able*‡: and since he will also reward us for bearing what he strengthens us to bear, well may we *count it all joy, when* led by him, *we fall into divers temptations*§.

Joy of this kind indeed, will unavoidably be mixed, in our weak natures, with an allay of uneasiness, and probably no small one. But be it ever so great, were it enough to extinguish for the present all feeling of pleasure and thankfulness intirely; yet we may certainly reflect, that we have cause to be pleased and thankful, if we could. And this alone will make our worst sufferings much more tolerable, than if we were to consider them as so much evil without any thing to counterbalance it. Besides, by looking on every thing in so animating a view, appearances will gradually change for the better, the vigour of our

* 2 Cor. iv. 15. 17.
† Rom. v. 2—5.
‡ 1 Cor. x. 13.
§ James i. 2.

minds will augment, and we shall come to smile at events, that formerly would have terrified and overwhelmed us. But this is wholly on supposition, that, with our heartiest efforts, we join our most earnest prayers for *grace to help in time of need**. The attacks upon us are often sudden, violent, and long: our own abilities, we have had but too much proof, are inconsiderable; and apt to fail us the most, when we depend on them with the fullest confidence. But the divine assistance can enable us to do every thing: and, though our beginnings be feeble, yet, if we sincerely trust in God, and faithfully exert the powers he will give us, *out of weakness we shall be made strong*†, and not only *run with patience the race that is set before us*‡, but *greatly rejoice that now for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations;* well knowing the gracious intention of our heavenly Father to be this, *that the trial of our faith may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ*§.

Let us therefore seriously and often recollect not only the monstrous ingratitude of repining, and the very blameable unreasonableness of despondency, but the strong obligation of being as thankful for all things, as the infirmity of our nature will permit. Indeed merely using pious words of thankfulness for afflictions, insincerely, without any correspondent sense of what we utter, would be an affectation, disgustful to men, and provoking to God. But forming our hearts, in the degree that we are able, to the real spirit of it, is one of the noblest exercises of inward devotion. As we are imperfect in every duty, we shall in all likelihood be more peculiarly imperfect

* Heb. iv. 16.
† Heb. xi. 34.
‡ Heb. xii. 1.
§ 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

in so exalted and difficult a one: and we should not be dejected on finding that we are. But neither should we ever cease either praying or endeavouring to attain, what is in truth a valuable part of the temper of Heaven. When we come thither, we shall clearly perceive the usefulness of our most exquisite sufferings here, and praise God for them to eternity; therefore let us be persuaded of their usefulness in the mean time, and begin to praise him for them now.

But these and all our praises the Apostle directs us,

III. To offer up *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

By him, as the Scripture expressly teaches, *God made the worlds*: by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible: all things were created by him and for him, and by him all things consist*†. Therefore in every act of worship, his name is to be joined with that of the Father Almighty. By him have the various dispensations of Providence been administered from the beginning: and particularly that most important one of the restoration of fallen and corrupted man, *through the tender mercy of our God*‡, *who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins*§. Therefore, all our thanksgivings ought to commemorate the source of all our blessings. *Honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God through thy blood, out of every*

* Heb. i. 2.
† Col. i. 16, 17.
‡ Luke i. 78.
§ Col. i. 13, 14.

*kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation**. By him also, was the knowledge of their duty and hopes revealed to mankind: by him the *day-spring from on high visited us to give light to them that sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and guide our feet into the way of peace*†. Through *the spirit of Christ, which was in them*‡, the prophets of the Old Testament directed and cheered the earlier ages: his own personal instructions much more abundantly enlightened the Apostles: and the succession of teachers, which he appointed, hath conveyed the glad tidings of his Gospel down to us, and will to the world's end. *Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift*§.

Reasoning hath bewildered men in multitudes of errors, and led them into very little truth. It could not lead them into any certainty of those truths, which were of the greatest importance to sinners: pardon, grace, and eternal happiness. It could not assure us of that comfortable doctrine of the text, that we have cause to thank God for every thing which befalls us. For how should the wisest of men attain, by the mere exercise of his own faculties, to know, whether it be possible in the nature of things, and fit upon the whole, for the Supreme Being to order all events in such a manner, as that every one of them shall be for the benefit of every good person? we may wish this indeed; we may hope it; and it is the most glorious hope, that we are capable of: but a ground of firm reliance can be only from the gracious declarations of our blessed Lord, or his authorised servants: and we are strictly bound to ask and receive this and every bounty from above, as believers in him. Justly then

* Rev. v. 13. 19.
† Luke i. 78, 79.
‡ 1 Pet. 10, 11.
§ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

doth St. Paul direct us: *whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him**. And again: *in every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ concerning you*†. Suitably to which precepts, St. Peter represents it as the great end of our whole behaviour *that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ*‡. *By him therefore*, as the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts, *let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, giving thanks to his name*§. His merciful purpose in what he hath done for us, and what he hath taught us, is that we may be happy, not only hereafter but even here. *These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*‖. He underwent on our account the most dreadful of all afflictions, for this reason amongst others, to *leave us an example that we should follow his steps*¶, *and look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, that we may not be wearied and faint in our minds***; *but rejoice in as much as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, we may be glad with exceeding joy*††.

And now, were but all, who profess Christianity, careful to qualify themselves for looking on the various occurrences of life, whether prosperous or adverse, as tokens of God's kind purposes towards them for the sake of his dear Son, and conscientious in paying him sincerely suitable acknowledgments: how void would they be of resentment to each other; how full of pity to such as would injure them,

* Col. iii. 17. † Thess. v. 18. ‡ 1 Pet. iv. 11.
§ Heb. xiii. 15. ‖ John xvi. 33. ¶ 1 Pet. ii. 21.
** Heb. xii. 2, 3. †† 1 Pet. iv. 13.

knowing that they can only hurt themselves: what a pleasing security against fear and disappointment, what *strong consolation** under sorrow and pain, what a powerful support under all the decays of body or mind, would they enjoy: how delightful would be their intercourse with Heaven, consisting almost wholly in acts of gratitude and praise: how blissful a sense of God's love to them must they feel continually increasing; and how irresistible a recommendation of *the doctrine of God our Saviour*† must these admirable fruits of it exhibit to all mankind! very different is the present state of things. But to every one, who steadily practises this duty, the benefits of it are just the same, as if it were practised universally. All outward molestations, instead of destroying his inward peace, contribute, he knows, to promote his true welfare. And though he is tenderly grieved for the guilt, and the misery present and future, of the incorrigibly bad, while they applaud themselves, and despise or hate him, yet his concern is tempered with that placid acquiescence in the most awful parts of God's will, which the Redeemer, though *he wept over Jerusalem*‡, felt when he said: *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent,* meaning in their own imaginations, *and hast revealed them unto babes,* persons of an humble simplicity of heart: *even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*§. Yet, though cordially reconciled to every thing which he sees and expects, the good Christian pleases himself peculiarly with the prospect of that promised time, when on this earth *all the people shall be righteous*‖: but inexpressibly more

* Heb. vi. 18. † Tit. ii. 10. ‡ Luke xix. 41.
§ Matth. ix. 25, 26. Luke x. 21. ‖ Is. lx. 21.

with the assurance of a blessed eternity, in which all who are accounted worthy to partake shall at length magnify the judge of the world, with unmixed delights, for every thing they have suffered, as well as every thing they have enjoyed; *and sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,* the final result of all the divine revelations, recorded from the first, *saying: great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy,—thy judgments are made manifest**.

* Rev. xv. 3, 4.

SERMON XIII.

PSALM CXXVIII. 5, 6.

The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion, and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.

THE subject of this psalm is declared in the first verse. *Blessed is every one, that feareth the Lord, that walketh in his ways.* For *godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come* *. The present happiness attending it was indeed somewhat more visible, while there was more need it should, in those earlier times, when the future rewards of it were less clearly discovered. But in every succeeding age also, the practice of religion and virtue hath appeared, to all prudent enquirers, the likeliest and surest way to avoid the miseries of life, and secure the enjoyments of it. The first advantage, which the Psalmist promises to the pious, comprehends in general health and success in their affairs. *For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall he well with thee.* The next is a particular blessing of the nearest concern; the possession of domestic and conjugal felicity, in the midst of a large and well ordered family. *Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.* For such plants would

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

soon afford both an agreeable shelter to those who feast under them in the open air, as the eastern manner was, and a considerable profit to the owners of them. Delight, security, and plenty at home, being usually the principal objects of desire, the Psalmist lays an emphatical stress on them, by adding, *behold, thus shall the man be blessed, that feareth the Lord.*

But still, as good persons can never thoroughly relish their own private welfare, if the community suffers at the same time, or calamaties are likely to befall it soon, an assurance is given them in the last place, that their exemplary obedience to the laws of God will, through his mercy, contribute to their being witnesses of the prosperity, both of their country and their descendants, during a long course of years. *The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion, and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel:* in which concluding part of this most pleasing view even of the present condition of religious and virtuous persons, we have it signified to us,

I. That a large portion of their happiness consists in the flourishing state of their country.

II. That this happiness is greatly increased by a prospect, that their own posterity will continue to flourish with it.

III. That both these things depend on, and are to to be expected from, the divine benediction.

I. That a large portion of their happiness consists in the flourishing state of their country.

Every thing hath an influence on our enjoyments, in proportion to the share which it hath in our affections. And affection to the public never fails to be remarkably strong in worthy breasts. The complete character indeed of social virtue, if considered in

theory, is good will towards all men. And no concern for a part deserves praise, if it be inconsistent with benevolence to the whole. But the whole, even of this earth, is an object so vast, that few, if any, can preserve in their minds a fixed regard to it, or entertain the smallest hope of doing it service. Therefore mankind is advantageously divided into many particular societies. And a zeal in the members of each for the benfit of their own, deserves not only to be encouraged as a most useful quality, but honoured, as a most laudable one. It shews a rightness and greatness of mind, capable of being affected by a common interest: it shews the most amiable of virtues, love, towards a large part of our fellow-creatures, and implies nothing contrary towards the rest. For the real good of every people in the world is compatible with the real good of every other. To rule and to oppress is no good to any: and peace and liberty and friendly intercourse for mutual convenience all the nations of the earth may enjoy at once. The happiness of individuals, (we experience it) depends, not on rising above others, but on being easy and well within themselves, and reasonably secure of continuing so. In like manner the happiness of kingdoms and states depends, not on extended dominion or superfluity of wealth, (whence often proceeds every kind of evil,) but on inward good order and outward safety. These things we may and must rejoice to see our country possess: and these are the only things, which the love of it requires us to have at heart.

This virtue indeed, as well as others, hath been frequently misunderstood: and false appearances of it unhappily pursued. Yet even then so much rightness of intention towards their own community was mixed in the minds of men with wrong behaviour towards

the nations round them, that their injustice, though monstrous, hath been always considered with indulgence, nay often admired as heroism. And the only people too severely censured on this head, hath been the Jewish: whose very law some have charged with teaching ill will to the rest of the world, though it hath more precepts of compassion and tenderness towards them, than perhaps any other. They were indeed commanded to set out with extirpating the Canaanites, and planting themselves in their land. But well might Heaven decree, after a forbearance of several ages, the destruction of these wretches, abandoned at once to the most unnatural lusts, and the most shocking barbarities; and (which made their recovery hopeless) both of them practised, as acts of their religion. Nor could the Jews be more strongly warned against committing such enormities, than by being appointed to punish them; as God may certainly punish, either by his own hand, or by whom he will. But with all mankind ever after, they were to live in peace: only avoiding intimacies likely to corrupt them, and extinguish that profession of faith in the one true God, which they were designed to preserve for the general benefit. Accordingly they were, when free, as good neighbours, and when conquered, as good subjects, as other men; till heathen persecution provoked them to hate even those heathens, who were no persecutors; and then it was time for our Saviour to teach them not the love of their country, (for of that, such as it was, they had too much) but the universal love of all men: a doctrine equally needful, though on different accounts, for the Romans also. Yet he, and his great Apostle St. Paul, were shining examples of most affectionate concern for their brethren of the house of Israel, even while they received

the cruellest treatment from them. And, though the first disciples were chiefly private persons, under one absolute dominion, and that, of unbelieving magistrates, and consequently no other political injunctions, than those of dutiful obedience and uniformly moral behaviour, could with propriety be laid upon them: yet these are inculcated with such diligence, and grounded on such principles in the New Testament, that as ample a provision is made by them for the public welfare as then was feasible: and whoever will seriously consider the Gospel rules, will be far from asserting, with a late author *, that the love of his country is a virtue purely voluntary in a Christian.

If the love of all men be required by our religion, the love of those, whom we are most able to serve, must be understood as peculiarly required. If we are to feel for strangers and enemies, we cannot but feel more strongly for those, to whom acquaintance and neighbourhood, relation and friendship, common laws and common interests, unite us. It was never from the extensiveness of their benevolence, but the narrowness of it, that men have made the public suffer: and therefore the truer Christian any one is, the truer patriot he will ever be. And especially if the equity of the civil constitution under which he lives, remarkably secures whatever is valuable to men at present; and the purity of the doctrines publicly taught, leads them the safest way to eternal bliss hereafter; he will rejoice and be thankful from the bottom of his soul, that *the lot is fallen unto him in so fair a ground* †: where he can *sing of mercy and judgment* ‡, and *go with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise* §.

* Lord Shaftesbury.

† Psalm xvi. 6.

‡ Psalm ci. 1.

§ Psalm xlii. 4.

But, though every pious person will always consider the happiness of his country, as a very interesting part of his own, yet the degree in which he will consider it so, must greatly depend on the relation to it, in which he stands. And therefore they who are distinguished by the more important relations, whose office and business consists in being *the ministers of God for good* *, to numbers, to nations of their fellow-creatures at once, they must have exalted satisfaction in seeing *the pleasure of the Lord prosper in their hands* †. Every instance of national felicity must warm their breasts with singular consolation: above all, when they are conscious of its arising from their own rightness of mind, and vigilance of conduct: when they know they have deserved from the people under them that excellent character of David: *he fed them with a faithful and true heart, and ruled them prudently with all his power* ‡.

II. The next thing to be learnt from the text is, that the happiness, accruing to good men from the flourishing state of their country, is greatly increased by the prospect, that their own posterity will continue to flourish with it.

The desire of exerting our tenderest affections, which are the conjugal and parental, and leaving representatives of ourselves behind us, to preserve our name, inherit our substance, and carry on the designs of Providence on earth, is deeply rooted in our frame: it hath always influenced the conduct of men, in proportion as they have lived agreeably to the simplicity of nature: and they who have thought the absolute restraint of this inclination the way to higher degrees of purity and spiritual perfection, have entertained a

* Rom. xiii. 4. † Is. liii. 10. ‡ Psalm lxxviii. 73.

notion as evidently wrong, as the divine constitution of things is right. But though such imaginations are groundless, preclude the exercise of many virtues, and weaken human society: yet the indulgence of irregular liberties, however favourably their own or common practice may induce persons to think of them, produces effects far more hurtful: overturns all good order, destroys the peace of families, introduces endless confusions and distresses, causes most afflicting breaches of faith, tempts to most execrable barbarities, effaces gradually all moral principles, and begets more crimes and sorrows, than almost any one sin besides. The sacred institution of marriage therefore is of the utmost importance to the innocence and the happiness of mankind. They who avoid it, as engaging them in cares and troubles, distrust the goodness of God, who hath made every article of proper behaviour, on the whole, our present interest: and they who discourage it, as many do grievously, though not professedly, by running into needless expences and refinements, pervert for the sake of vanities and follies, the plain way, which Heaven hath marked out for public strength and private comfort.

Marriage lays the ground-work of all those kindreds and affinities, which unite us together, by so many engaging ties; and from which proceed such numerous relative duties, equally beneficial and delightful. Marriage allots to the several members of the society, distinct parts of it for objects of their peculiar concern: and their affection to these animates their zeal for the welfare of the whole. Their country seems nearer akin to them, for having persons, whom they love as themselves, interested in what befalls it: they study its future prosperity from their attachment to

those whom they shall leave behind them; and triumph beforehand in the prospect of happiness to their descendants, when they shall be no more. Indolence and selfishness would incline men, still much more powerfully than they do, to behaviour of pernicious consequence on many occasions, were they influenced by personal considerations only: but regard to their posterity enlarges their views, gives them a sympathy with distant times, and excites them to prefer without hesitation and with pleasure, the lasting benefit of others, though remote, to the greatest and dearest of their own short-lived advantages and gratifications.

Now if a likelihood, merely that their offspring shall partake in the general felicity, is able to fill the minds of men with such emotions; what transporting reflections must they have, whose descendants appear destined by the stations of their parents to be authors of that felicity in their turn and degree! How strongly must such a hope induce them to secure by good example and instruction this highest honour and blessedness to such as are to inherit their dignities! And how warm a return of most affectionate gratitude will they merit and receive from mankind, if virtue and liberty shall not only be supported by them in the present age, but transmitted to succeeding ones, by their pious care of forming their progeny to the knowledge and the love of public good! The prospect only of *childrens' children* would have little joy in it, without that of *peace upon Israel:* without a reasonable expectation of their contributing to the true glory of the family, from which they spring, and the true happiness of the nation, over which they are to preside. But when due provision is made for this,

both sovereign and people may take up the words of the Psalmist: *Like as the arrows in the hand of the giant, even so are the young children. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate**.

But then, as ever, we hope to see either our public or our private happiness continue, we must be careful to remember,

III. That both depend on the divine benediction. *Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.—Children, and the fruit of the womb, are an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord* †. These are the express declarations of holy writ: and both reason and experience humbly subscribe to them. It is not indeed possible for us in many cases to discern particularly in what manner the Providence of God conducts things: but we may plainly discern in general, that as the whole course of nature is nothing else than the free appointment, which he hath been pleased to make; as the motions of the inanimate world proceed from those which he originally impressed upon it; and all the thoughts and actions of intelligent beings are doubtless absolutely subject to the influence of their Maker; (since we see they are greatly subject, and often when they perceive it not, to that of their fellow-creatures;) it must be in his power by various ways, perhaps the more effectual for being unknown, to dispose of every thing so, as may best answer his wise purposes of mercy or correction. And as he evidently can do this, it is likewise evidently worthy of him to do it;

* Psalm cxxvii. 5, 6. † Psalm cxxvii. 1, 2. 4.

for the highest of his titles is that of the moral governor of the universe: and therefore, we may firmly believe the Scripture assuring us, that he doth it in fact; that he makes *all things work together for good to them that love him* *, and *curses the* very *blessings* † of those who love him not.

Whenever then we find our affairs going on to our content, our families flourishing, our healths constant, our hearts full of exultation, and dictating language to us like that of David, *In my prosperity I said, I shall never be removed;* let us be sure also like him to add, *Thou, Lord, of thy goodness hast made my hill so strong* ‡. In the hand of God it is, whether we shall have the things that we wish for; whether, when we have them, they shall prove comforts or afflictions, the joy or the grief of our souls; whether lastly, if they are ever so dear to us, they shall remain with us, or be snatched from us: and, therefore, it unspeakably concerns us all to interest Providence in our behalf. They, whom God favours most, are by no means exempt from sufferings: but he not only will always make religious persons full amends hereafter, but ordinarily grant them deliverance and consolation here. Thus the Psalmist, immediately after his above-mentioned triumph, had cause to subjoin, *Thou didst turn thy face from me, and I was troubled* §. But it follows, *Then cried I unto thee, and gat me to my Lord right humbly* ‖. *Thou turnedst my heaviness into joy: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness* ¶. Nor was this a singular mercy to him, or confined to the more worldly Jewish dispensation: but our blessed Redeemer hath given a general promise to his disciples,

* Rom. viii. 28. † Mal. ii. 2. ‡ Psalm xxx. 6.
§ Psalm xxx. 7. ‖ Psalm xxx. 8. ¶ Psalm xxx. 12.

that they, who *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,* shall have *all things* needful *added unto them**: and *shall,* even when molested *with persecutions, receive now in this time an hundred fold* of what they undergo, as well as *in the world to come eternal life*†.

Persecutions indeed, more or less, the Apostle hath told us, *all shall suffer that will live godly in Christ*‡: and partly on that very account. But in these, they shall be enabled *to take pleasure* §, even when they are the heaviest: and usually they are very light, compared with the calamities, which the wicked bring on their own heads. The natural tendency of Christian virtues is to happiness; of sin, to misery: God hath appointed this tendency, and he will make it effectual. If nations, in the midst of their wealth and tranquillity, will not shew they are sensible, that he bestows them, he will justly prove it by taking them away. And if those persons whom he hath raised to superior honours, and favoured with marks of distinguished goodness, will ungratefully forget, by whose power and for whose service they were thus exalted and blessed, he can easily make them know by unexpected judgments, *that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men* ‖, *and doth according to his will in the armies of Heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of the earth.* But princes and their people, joining together in thankful obedience to the laws of their Great Benefactor, will be happy in themselves and each other, will *shine as lights in the world* ¶; and to speak in the language of the Prophet, *upon all their glory there shall be a defence* **. *For God*

* Matth vi. 33. † Mark x. 30. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 12.
§ 2 Cor. xii. 10. ‖ Dan. iv. 25. ¶ Phil. ii. 15.
** Isaiah iv. 5.

will save Sion, and build the cities of Judah.—The posterity also of his servants shall inherit it; and they, that love his name, shall dwell therein. Their children shall continue, and their seed be established before him†.*

* Psalm lxix. 36, 37. † Psalm cii. 28.

SERMON XIV.

MATTH. VI. 16.

Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites.

THE practice of fasting from a principle of religion has been thought of by different persons in so very different a manner; some placing it amongst the highest duties, whilst others account it mere superstition: and a great part of those, who observe it the most rigidly, are so little improved by it in true goodness: that, I hope, discoursing on this subject may be useful in general, as well as particularly seasonable at present, to direct your judgment and behaviour in relation to it. And therefore, I have chosen to treat of it from words of the greatest authority; those of our blessed Saviour: which contain,

I. A supposition, that religious fasting would be used amongst his followers: *When ye fast.*

II. A caution against using it amiss: *Be not as the hypocrites.*

I. A supposition, that religious fasting would be used amongst his followers: which indeed he must suppose of course, unless he forbad it; because the custom had very long been, and was then, universal in the world. Not only the people of the great city and empire of Nineveh, as we read in Scripture, but the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, almost all nations, of whose religion we have any particular accounts, appear to have been led, either by nature or ancient

tradition, to abstain from their food, on certain occasions, as an exercise of piety. The Jewish law could not be the original of an observance, that had spread so wide: especially, as that law appoints but one single day in the whole year to be kept as a public fast, and gives no orders for private fasting at all. Yet we find, from the early times of their commonwealth downwards, many other public facts observed by them, as exigencies required: we find the Prophets approving and enjoining them, and directing how they are to be solemnized: we find the most exemplary in goodness amongst them taking this way of humbling themselves before God in secret, not only on personal and domestic, but national accounts, and graciously accepted in so doing.

The same usage continued to our Saviour's days. For we read in St. Luke*, of Anna the Prophetess, that *she served God with fastings and prayers night and day.* Indeed by this time, over and above several yearly fasts, appointed by authority†, the stricter sort observed two every week voluntarily‡. And not only the Pharisees, but John's disciples also, fasted often§. Nor doth our blessed Lord condemn any part of these things: but, leaving the frequency of fasting to public and private prudence, regulates only the manner of it; and by so doing, plainly treats it as a practice intended for perpetual use. It is true, he doth not, in so many words, *command* his disciples to fast: he only saith, *When ye fast.* But so he had said just before, *when thou dost thine alms*‖, *when thou prayest*¶. Yet these are certainly duties of Christianity. And had he not designed, that fasting should be considered in some degree as a

* Luke ii. 37. † Zacch. viii. 19. ‡ Luke xviii. 12.
§ Matth. ix. 14. ‖ Verse 2. ¶ Verse 6.

duty also; he would never have promised a reward to the right performance of it, as he doth in the next verse, but one, after the text. And besides, he not only fasted himself, in a manner quite beyond our imitation, but declared, that though then his disciples did not fast, yet after *he was taken from them, they should**: which they verified accordingly. Cornelius indeed was not yet a Christian, when he fasted to the ninth hour †: but that was amongst the means of his becoming one. We read in the following chapters of the Acts, that congregations, under the guidance of Prophets and Apostles, fasted on more occasions than one ‡. St. Paul enjoins private persons to *give themselves* at times *to fasting and prayer* §. The whole Christian church, from the beginning, hath both esteemed and practised it not a little: and to this day both the ecclesiastical and civil powers continue to prescribe it.

If then we have any regard to the example and experience of good persons, to the injunctions and commands of our earthly superiors, or to the authority of Scripture itself; we cannot think fasting an observance to be either blamed or slighted. But for yet fuller satisfaction, and indeed for our direction also, let us inquire more particularly, what its meaning and uses are.

One very useful meaning is, to express our sorrow for having offended God, and our sense of not deserving the least of his favours. By some it hath been thought, that our first parents introduced it, as a penitential memorial of their eating the forbidden fruit: which indeed it might very properly express. But without insisting on this, for which we have no

* Matt. ix. 15.
† Acts x. 30.
‡ Acts xiii. 2, 3. xiv. 23.
§ 1 Cor. vii. 5.

warrant, abstaining for some time from our daily food signifies, most naturally, that we are unworthy of it; and can take no comfort in it, whilst we are under the divine displeasure. And as anciently, every thing of importance was denoted, especially in the Eastern countries, by actions as well as words; this was probably the original purpose, for which men used fasting. And it was then sometimes extended to children, and cattle; in token, that the parents and owners of them had forfeited the dearest blessings, and most valuable conveniences of life*. It is true, a proper confession in words would have expressed the same thing, that this ceremony doth, and somewhat more clearly, unless it were explained by words. But in all likelihood it usually was: or if not, the difficulty of understanding it cannot be accounted great. And where it is appointed by authority, or prevails by custom, as the established method of signifying humiliation, we are as much bound to comply with it, as with any other appointment or custom; and should be as justly thought disobedient or unsociable, if we refused: even though it had no peculiar advantages to compensate for its being of less obvious meaning: whereas indeed it hath considerable ones. For words alone are far from carrying with them that energy and influence upon the mind, which the superadded solemnity of such an abstinence must, even in private cases; and much more, when whole assemblies, and cities, and countries, join in it. But above all, when either persons or nations have been remarkably wicked, such moving and afflicting acknowledgments of it are singularly adapted to produce more powerful and lasting impressions on those, who make use of them; and by

* Joel ii. 16. Jonah iii. 7, 8. Judith iv. 10.

that means to render them fitter objects of divine mercy. Indeed, were every method, which the warmer imaginations of the Eastern people suggested formerly, and found really conducive to this end, practised now among such, as are less accustomed and disposed to significative actions, considerable inconveniences might follow: and in fact, multiplying ritual observances hath contributed almost every where to darken religion, and corrupt it. But so simple and intelligible an usage, as mere fasting, may surely be employed, in any age and place, without danger.

And, besides the good effects it may have, as a strong outward mark of repentance, it may be a cause, by its physical effects, of our feeling greater degrees of inward conviction. The faculties of many persons are overloaded by continual excess, and *the corruptible body presseth down the soul**: nor can it exert itself, till the burthen upon it is lightened. And without what is commonly called excess, a constant course of high or full living hath so powerful a tendency to immerse our thoughts in worldly objects, and make us, both indolent as to our eternal interests, and fearless of the consequences of such indolence: that all, who pass their days in the free enjoyment of plenty, have need frequently to interrupt their indulgences, however lawful in their nature: to admonish themselves, by so doing, that they have much more important concerns, than the gratification of sense and ease: and to view the state of their souls with attentive thoughtfulness, which abstinence, and its proper companion retirement, would beget. Assuredly numbers of them would then see their condition in respect of God, and a future life, in a very

* Wisd. ix. 15.

different light, from that, which warm blood, gay spirits, and presumptuous imaginations place it in. And for want of such views it is, that so many are grossly wicked, and so many more very imperfectly and insufficiently good: whom a habit of considerate self-restraint would render by degrees indifferent to earthly enjoyments, and solicitous for those of a better world. Nay, even single acts of such restraint will usually, for the time, lower our passions into some good measure of composedness, and make our sorrow for sin humbler and deeper; on both which accounts fasting is called in Scripture, *afflicting the soul**. For it mortifies the desires of the sensitive part, and enlivens the remorse of the rational. By these means, it may contribute much to render our faith of invisible things more lively, and our devotions more fervent: for which reason fasting is always understood in Scripture, and always ought in practice, to be accompanied by prayer. And in proportion as it qualifies us to pray as we ought, it assures us of obtaining our requests; whether they be for averting God's judgments, or deriving his mercies upon us, in our public capacity or private.

But farther yet, fasting not only assists humiliation and devotion, but is in other ways also friendly to virtue. Inflicting it on ourselves as a penalty, when we have been guilty of any great sin, will contribute greatly and yet with perfect safety, if it be done with discretion, to our becoming weary and afraid of sinning. Accordingly St. Paul speaks of self-punishment, as a very useful and beneficial fruit of true repentance. *For behold, your sorrowing after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge*†. But especially, if

* Is. lviii. 3. 5. † 2 Cor. vii. 11.

we have been seduced into unlawful pleasures of sense, or even are in danger of it only, fasting is peculiarly medicinal: withdraws the fuel from irregular desires; proves to us by experience, and strengthens by use, our ability of bridling our natural appetites; and so prevents our undoing ourselves, by trusting vainly to the plea of human infirmity, as an excuse for deliberate transgression, or supine negligence. Exercises of moderate hardship add a vigour to the mind: and were on that account recommended even by heathen moralists*, as teaching contempt of low gratifications, and of the wealth that ministers to them; of the blandishments of luxury, and the false elegance of effeminate politeness. But far stronger inducements have we Christians to take the most effectual methods for exalting our souls above these things: as we know, to a much higher degree of certainty, that *the carnal mind is enmity against God*†; that they, who *live in pleasure, are dead whilst they live*‡; and that by detaching our affections properly from things on earth, we shall attain the blessedness of Heaven§.

Nor will fasting contribute only to mortify our fondness for sensual indulgences; but also to abate the impetuosity of vehement spirits; and that *pride of heart*, which the prophet Ezekiel, in the case of Sodom and Jerusalem, connects with *fulness of bread*‖. We often find the same persons, when pampered into luxuriant health, overbearing, impatient of contradiction, outrageous in anger, who, when voluntary or necessary abstinence hath reduced them to a calmer state of mind, are considerate, reasonable, and humane. But particularly it inspires humanity

* Arr. Epict. l. 3. c. 12. and c. 14. † Rom. viii. 7.
‡ 1 Tim. v. 6. § Col. iii. 1. &c. ‖ Ezek. xvi. 49.

and compassion to the poor. For it gives us experience from time to time, of what they are often forced to feel: and not only reminds all persons, but better enables those of middling circumstances, by lessening now and then their expences on themselves, to relieve the wants of their indigent brethren: for which reason the prophet Isaiah supposes it attended by doing every act of equity and mercy, but especially giving of alms; and introduces God himself, saying: *Is not this the fast, that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burthens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry; and that thou bring the poor, that are cast out, to thy house; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh** ?

These are some of the spiritual benefits, for I omit to mention the corporeal ones, though very considerable, which recommend fasting. And surely they are at least sufficient to keep every pretender to seriousness from deriding it, or thinking meanly of such as practise it. Though any one may judge, or find, it ever so useless to himself: yet he cannot well know what it may be to others. And therefore, the rule of Scripture is in this sense perfectly just: *Let not him that eateth, despise him, that eateth not*†. If he doth, his contempt may light on characters of the highest eminence in wisdom and goodness; as it happened in the case of the royal Psalmist: *The reproaches of them, that reproached thee, are fallen upon me. I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting; and that was turned to my reproof*‡.

* Is. lviii. 6, 7. Hence Hermas directs, lib. 3. Sim. 5, that the money saved by fasting be given to the poor.

† Rom. xiv. 3. ‡ Ps. lxix. 9, 10.

But as we ought, by all the prudence we can, to spare others the guilt, and ourselves the uneasiness and provocation, of such unkind treatment: so we should be yet more careful not to deserve it in any degree: and should therefore take diligent notice that the text contains,

II. A caution against using this practice amiss. Our Saviour indeed prohibits expressly no other abuses, than such as hypocrites committed: and mentions, of those, only one in particular. But as he certainly meant that merely for a specimen of many; and designed, that all should be avoided; it will be useful to set before you others also, most of which are condemned expressly somewhere in the word of God: and all implicitly here.

Fasting is a duty, not for its own sake: for neither *meat*, nor abstaining from meat, *commendeth us to God**: but for the sake of its good effects. Proportionably therefore, as in any person's case it is found, on impartial and full trial, to fail of those effects, or to produce bad ones, which outweigh or equal them, it ceases to be a duty; any farther than the obligation of setting no hurtful example, of giving no offence, may justly demand regard. And as the cases of different persons differ extremely, it is either wicked tyranny, or pitiable unskilfulness, to enjoin, as the church of Rome doth, all persons to abstain, so often, and for so long together, from eating flesh; and all persons of such an age, and such a state of life and health, to eat only once in a day, or little more, of what they are suffered to eat. Prescribing such rules, as these, to the whole world, must bring hardships and distresses on millions of persons, especially the poor, from which they can receive no good, but may

* 1 Cor. viii. 8.

suffer much harm. It will give them wrong notions of religion, as consisting principally in outward observances; and multiply grievously the temptations to sin, by adding imaginary duties, that will often be more difficult than the real ones. They allow indeed some occasional exceptions from these general rules: and yet, even did they also allow persons to judge for themselves, when their circumstances came within those exceptions, it would still be a source of endless doubts and scruples to timorous minds. But besides the uncertainty, whether they may in conscience desire to be excepted, they are subjected to the will and pleasure of others, whether that desire shall be granted: and to a large expence for it, if it be: and these and other dispensations are one fund of wealth to the clergy and court of Rome, which they have used to the vilest purposes. No part of all this is founded on Scripture: nor even on the practice of the primitive church; which for some ages laid no necessity on any one fasting at such particular annual seasons; much less of fasting for many days and weeks together; and when they did fast, made no distinction between the use of flesh and fish; but left every one the liberty, which Christ and his Apostles had left them: as indeed our own church hath done too. For though it hath mentioned certain times of abstinence, which it might have been unsafe not to mention at the time of the Reformation: yet this, being backed by no new injunction, amounts only to recommending them, so far as each person shall find no real objection against them. And certainly most, if not all persons would find, on the contrary, much benefit from lessening even their lawful indulgences of sense at proper seasons, and the present season in particular. But in order to our judging rightly, in

what degree this will be expedient for us, divers things ought to be considered. Not many indeed of our church, in the present age, run at all into excessive austerities: very far from it, God knows. But if any do, they ought to be warned: and though none did here, the Christian doctrine ought to be vindicated from the imputation of leading to such extremes any where.

Some observe constantly a diet sufficiently low; some few perhaps too low. Now for these, who live in a state of daily fasting, to superadd other fasts, especially frequent and rigid ones, may be prejudicial, not only to their healths, of which they are bound to be careful, but to their moral dispositions, and their very understandings. It may render them less, instead of more capable of serious reflection and religious exercises: it may unfit them to go through their proper business in common life: it may incline them strongly to moroseness of temper. And though the ill-humour, into which people wilfully work themselves upon fasting days, is to be ascribed to themselves only: yet so much of it, as abstinence really brings upon them against their wills, is to be ascribed to that; and is no small evil. But farther yet: low-spirited and scrupulous persons may, for want of supporting their strength of body, on which the firmness of the mind in part depends, by a sufficient quantity of food, increase their fears and perplexities most surprisingly: till at length there will scarce remain a single action, that they can do or abstain from with a quiet conscience. And, at the same time, on the other hand, persons of warm and enthusiastic imaginations are heated by long and strict fasts beyond any thing: till they feel impulses, hear voices, see visions; forget the world to which they belong,

and live in a new one of their own creation. Now according to the degree, in which there is danger of any such inconveniences, we ought either to avoid intirely what causes them, or observe a due moderation in it: else our abstinence may easily do us much more hurt, than service.

And another important rule is, never to make vows, or even resolutions that we will fast so often, with such or such rigour, for any particular time to come, especially to any distant time. For it seldom or never happens that such things are of real advantage. And they have so frequently been snares and distresses, that all persons ought to be warned against them: and they who are most prone to them, ought to be most afraid of them.

But supposing we are, by nature, ever so well qualified to receive benefit from the practice of this duty: yet none will follow, unless we guard against mistakes.

Fasting consists in abstaining, wholly or in part, from our ordinary food. Abstaining, wholly, the former part of the day, is undoubtedly the natural, and should be the general method of doing this. But they, in whose case good reasons forbid it, may, by properly restraining themselves in the latter part, keep their fast to all good purposes, after they have, in common speech, broken it. Continuing a total abstinence longer than a day, can hardly ever be, and so long seldom is, either useful or safe. And though a considerable approach towards total abstinence for the whole day, if conducted prudently, may be allowed at proper intervals for some small time, when designed for self-punishment in great faults: as indeed lessening our fast into a trifle, on any occasion, public or private, would be mocking God, cheating ourselves, and giving scandal or bad example to

others *: yet when subduing irregular appetites and passions is the end in view, moderate severity, and barely, if at all, exceeding the strictness of an exact and rigorous temperance, but long continued, will be most effectual.

Abstaining from particular sorts of food, from flesh-meat for instance, as the strongest and most pleasing sort, if it be not hurtful, is very proper; and on public fasts especially, as being the common and most visible mark of compliance with what public authority enjoins. But still this abstinence, besides that laying a great stress upon it leads to superstition, or at least affords it countenance, may, to some persons, be no self-denial at all, but consistent with the most luxurious indulgence. There are many, to whom several sorts of fish are more delicious, than land aminals; and perhaps full as nutritive. Nay, methods have been invented, by which the palate is hardly ever so much pleased, as when it is pretended to be mortified. The true direction then concerning the fare of our fasting seasons, is that, which the example of the Prophet Daniel furnishes: *In those days I ate no pleasant bread* †: that is nothing contrived to gratify or provoke the appetite, but the plainest of wholesome diet. That we ought to be full as abstemious in what we drink, as what we eat, is very clear; and both are put on a level in the same passage of Daniel: *Neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth.* The Scripture also condemns every other needless indulgence at such times. *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find*

* And therefore Hermas, ubi supra, directs, that on fasting days nothing be taken, besides bread and water.

† Dan. x. 3. One moderate meal, of flesh or fish, without delicacy, was appointed by Queen Eliz. on an occasional fast. Strype's Life of Parker, p. 131—134.

pleasure *. Nor can there be a doubt, but intemperance, or even excess of gaiety, either designedly preceding a fast, as is common in the Romish carnival, or following one, as I fear may sometimes be the case in other churches, intirely destroys the religious use of it.

But though we observe, in the rightest manner, every thing that relates to the outward act: yet, *bodily exercise*, of this or any other kind, *profiteth little* †, unless it be performed with good and proper dispositions of soul. When the Jews, in Isaiah's time, fasted *for strife and debate*, to serve the purposes of animosity and contention; far from being an act of piety, it was only *smiting with the fist of wickedness* ‡. When the hypocrites, in our Saviour's time, made, by their mournful looks, a public ostentation of their private abstinence, he told them plainly, as the words immediately following the text inform us, that being seen and admired of men should be their only reward, and directed his disciples to conceal, as far as conveniently might be, not their obedience to authority when it enjoins days of humiliation, though doubtless it should be obeyed without affectation or unnecessary singularity, but their voluntary self-denials of this kind: *that thou appear not unto men to fast; but unto thy Father which seeth in secret.* When the vainglorious Pharisee fasted twice a week, and despised the poor Publican §, he had infinitely better never have fasted once in his life, and been humble in his heart. Fasting is in general a remedy, or needful precaution: therefore whoever takes it, confesses, by so doing, either a disease or a peculiar liableness to one ‖, of which nobody sure hath ground to boast;

* Is. lviii. 3. † 1 Tim. iv. 8. ‡ Is. lviii. 4. § Luke xviii. 11, 12.
‖ Taylor, Holy Living, c. 4. §. 5. No. 9.

and making our humiliation a matter of pride is turning our medicine into a poison. Yet, of the two, condemning others is still worse, than being vain of ourselves. *Let not him* therefore, *which eateth not, judge him that eateth*, for very possibly *God hath received* and accepted *him* *; but remember, that both the Apostles, and our Saviour himself, were unjustly censured by the Jews on this very account †. The persons, whom you blame for not fasting, may fast, in effect at least, more than you know of; or may have little or no need of it, and be possessed without it, of all the good, that was designed to be attained by it. For it is but an instrument: and whether the work be chiefly done by this instrument or that, provided it be well done, is not material: and, if it remain undone, having used the instrument ever so much will intitle us to no reward. Fasting, as managed by some, is or appears to be extremely difficult: and hence they are apt to think, that heaven is much indebted to them for it: whereas perhaps they are much in fault for making it so difficult; or, if they are not, at best they have done only their duty, and so are unprofitable servants ‡. Even the truest and the greatest virtues cannot deserve the pardon of our past iniquities, and the recompence of future happiness; but only qualify us to receive them from Go s mercy, granted for the sake of our blessed Redeemer; much less then can bodily austerities, which are only means of virtue, do either of these things. But, least of all, will they be able to do it for those, who on the supposed merit of them, venture on such transgressions as they like, and so make *Christ the minister of sin* §.

Deluding ourselves by such contrivances, and at-

* Rom. xiv. 3. † Matth. ix. 14. xi. 19.
‡ Luke xvii. 10. § Gal. ii. 17.

tempting to impose upon God the performance of some small part of what he requires, instead of the whole, is as real, and more absurd and fatal hypocrisy, than endeavouring to deceive our fellow-creatures. It therefore comes directly under the prohibition of the text: and we have peculiar need to be on our guard against it at present. Of late years we have observed public fasts with more strictness and devotion, than had been seen amongst us in the memory of man. And so far all was well. But have we been afterwards uniformly pious and virtuous, watchful against all sin, and occasions of sin, attentive to our spiritual state and the great concerns of eternity? Or have we thought, that crowding the churches for a day, and abstaining from a folly or two for a winter, perhaps with an ill-will, was religion enough to save the nation and our souls? If any thing like such imaginations have taken hold of us, we have adulterated and debased a powerful remedy into an useless and mischievous palliative, and while we trust to it, are farther from the hope of a radical cure than ever. And were we to amend more thoroughly but for a short time only, our case will be very little better. *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away* *. Let us therefore, now and at all times, conscientiously beware of this, and every error, in respect of religious mortifications. Let us neither superstitiously over-value, nor profanely despise, institutions for that purpose: neither treat ourselves with unprofitable harshness, nor with hurtful indulgence: neither be influenced by servile dread, nor by irreverent presumption: neither submit our consciences to the com-

* Hos. vi. 4.

mands of men: as if they were doctrines of God; nor contemptuously reject proper helps for obeying the laws of God, as worthless inventions of men: neither exalt the means into the same rank with the end, nor hope to arrive at the end without the means. Let us, after the example of the holy Apostle, *so run as not uncertainly; so fight, as not beating the air:* but with strict and yet prudent discipline, *keep under the body and bring it into subjection*. For every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible* †. Which that we may all obtain, &c.

* 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27. † 1 Cor. ix. 25.

SERMON XV.

PROV. XXII. 1.

A good name is rather to be chosen, than great riches.

It seems very natural to wish, that amidst the great variety of things, which on various accounts appear desirable in this world, we could pass a right judgment concerning the proportionable value of each: that so we might determine, what share of our attention they severally merit; and, when they interfere, which ought to have the preference. Yet this we find to be in most cases, far beyond our skill. Whether power, or wealth, or ease, an active or a contemplative life, a private station or a public, this profession and employment or that, be more eligible; always hath been disputed, and always will. For the decision will depend on circumstances too numerous and too uncertain to be considered with exactness. And indeed it is for the interest of mankind, that the answers to questions of this sort should be involved in obscurity. For, suppose we all knew how to chuse, yet we could not all have our choice. And, as the whole must consist of very different parts; it is well that our not knowing which condition would be the best for us, contributes to our receiving, as we are bound, whatever falls to our lot, with a cheerful acquiescence in the appointment of Providence.

But though our Maker's wisdom hath left us greatly in the dark about such matters, in which taking one course or another is but seldom of considerable, if

any, importance to the most important of all things, the performance of our duty: yet, in whatever hath a stated connection with that, he hath given us plain directions, both by reason and Scripture, how we are to judge and behave. Now there is nothing more closely connected with virtue, than reputation: and therefore he hath connected it as closely with our happiness: not only teaching us, by nature, to esteem it as the chief of outward blessings; but by revelation, to preserve and cherish it with assiduous care The text, which I have read to you, prefers *a good name to great riches.* Another saith, it *is better than precious ointment* *: that is, than the costliest perfumes that were anciently used, in the gayest entertainments of the voluptuous, or the funeral honours of the great. And throughout the word of God, we are excited by examples, as well as precepts, to aim diligently at *obtaining a good report* †. Accordingly, mankind in all ages have been strongly influenced by this principle; and, in a great measure, to what they ought.

But still as the most powerful motives are apt to be slighted by some, and the rightest perverted by others: there are numbers, who profess to have scarce any regard to reputation; and still greater, who pay it a very undue regard. Therefore, it may be useful to shew you the wrongness and the danger,

I. Of having too little concern about it.

II. Of having too much.

I. Of having too little. One meets, not very uncommonly, with those who affect a perfect indifference to what a silly or malicious world, that hath

* Eccl. vii. 1.

† 1 Sam. ii. 24. Prov. xv. 30. Acts vi. 3. x. 22. xxii. 12. Phil. iv. 8. 1 Tim. iii. 7. Heb. xi. 2. 3 John 12.

nothing to do with them or their affairs, may please to think or talk about them. I say, they affect this; because, for the most part, it is mere affectation: and while they pretend not to be moved at all by what is reported of them, they plainly are moved by it greatly: not enough perhaps to conduct themselves with more discretion upon it, (and so much the worse for them;) but enough to be very uneasy and angry about it. Now what really disturbs them, it is a folly to put on the air of despising: and the only sensible method is, to take care and avoid it.

But they plead, that avoiding censure is impossible; people will say ill-natured things, and make spiteful constructions: some will always be raising stories, and others believing them: and why should one give one's self trouble to prevent what after all cannot be prevented? Nor can it be denied, that the world is very censorious: but it is by no means true, that they who keep on their guard, and they who do not, fare alike in it. Sometimes indeed very innocent and prudent persons may fall under very cruel imputations: but they rarely continue under them. And therefore, if it be not a rule without exception, it is one with but few exceptions, that whoever is much and generally and long evil spoken of, hath been faulty: very probably not in the degree, perhaps not in the manner, that is charged: but there hath been either an approach towards it, or a blameable appearance of it, or something or another that should not have been; else so many would not have judged, or at least have persisted in judging, so unfavourably. Still their judgment may be a sinful one. But why should we tempt them to that sin? It is hurting both them and ourselves. Professing to despise the ill opinion of mankind, creates a shrewd suspicion, that

we have deserved it. For if we have not; why do we lie so quiet under it? Why not explain our past conduct, if there be opportunity; or, however watch so carefully over our future behaviour, as by degrees to silence calumny? It is our duty, not only to be harmless, but useful in the world; and of what use can any person hope to be whom obloquy depreciates, and exposes to dislike? It is our duty, not only to be virtuous, but exemplary in virtue: and instead of that, we appear examples of wickedness, if we neglect aspersions thrown upon us, when we could wipe them off. And as every new example of it, real or seeming, adds new encouragement to it; the worst of sinners heinously aggravate their sins, by shewing that they are not ashamed of them; besides the imprudence of provoking private and public indignation or contempt.

But let the guilty manage as they will, surely the innocent must see, that their interest is, not to confound themselves with the former, and share in their reproach by disregarding reputation; but distinguish themselves by a constant, though unaffected, attention to it. Ill people may have their ends in desiring that you should appear like them: but your business is to appear different from them: otherwise you are so far virtuous to no purpose. And therefore, you forget yourself strangely, if you give up an advantage that is peculiar to you. A good name, of all things, is what a bad person cannot secure, and therefore you, that can, should on no account fail of doing it.

The judgment of others concerning us deserves respect: and to pay it none, is a shocking want of modesty. Besides, preservation of mutual esteem makes persons amiable to each other: and in that

way contributes largely to their common happiness. For it is hateful to think of living in the midst of bad characters only: and that single consideration should excite us powerfully to keep the face of things from having that look. But further, the sense of shame was given us by our Maker for a guard to our sense of duty. And as we want, on many occasions, every guard that we can have; we know not what evils may follow throwing aside this. Persons, who care not what they are thought, are in a very likely way not to care what they do. And, therefore, St. Paul hath most judiciously intermixed, as being intimately connected, regard to principle, and regard to character. *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest; whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things**.

But were contempt of reputation ever so consistent with our innocence, it would be greatly contrary to our interest notwithstanding. A lost, or even doubtful fame, in some points, fixes an almost indelible mark upon persons, which deprives them of many advantages in life, and often delivers them over to scorn and wretchedness, for the rest of their days. Nay, even when nothing bad can be said of any one, yet, if but little good can, this alone will usually have an unhappy influence on his future situation; whereas an eminently fair character prepossesses every body in the favour of him who bears it: engages friendly treatment, begets trust and confidence, gives credit and weight. Such will always be sought after and employed, respected in their prosperity, assisted under distresses: in short this distinction is,

* Phil. iv. 8.

in effect, beyond all that can be named, honour, and power, and wealth.

But then further, it is pleasure too, which only one other, near akin to it, can exceed or equal. For next to the consciousness of being good and worthy, that of being esteemed so, especially by those, who are such themselves, is undoubtedly the joyfullest feeling in the heart of man, and diffuses the highest satisfaction through every intercourse of life. But very afflicting must their inward sensations be, who know, they are justly hated, suspected, or despised: and in the midst of society must wander about, unesteemed and friendless.

Another very material consideration is, that, though offenders often return completely to their duty, it is but seldom and imperfectly that they ever regain their characters, when once forfeited: whereas, by preserving them, they secure not only many and great present benefits, but the pleasing prospect, in which our Maker hath, with unspeakable goodness, formed us to delight, of leaving an honourable memory behind them for their family to inherit; and a valuable bequest it frequently proves: while hereditary infamy is the cruel portion, that others leave to their posterity and kindred. *Have regard to thy name*, saith the wise son of Sirach, *for that shall continue above a thousand great treasures of gold. A happy life hath but a few days; but a good name endureth for ever**. On all accounts then it is our wisdom as well as our duty, to *provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men*†.

Still, it must be owned, there are occasions on which neglecting both parts of this rule may appear the shortest way to worldly prosperity. But these

* Ecclus. xli. 12, 13. † 2 Cor. viii. 21.

appearances are often deceitful. And when they prove such, what hath the wretch, who ventures upon this course, done; he hath lost his honour, and lost his peace, and got nothing for them. But whatever he gets, he will find his bargain at last a very dear one. He will feel himself inwardly no longer the same man, that he was: he will see himself treated, by the better part of mankind at least with the coldness, which he knows to come short of his desert; the respect paid him by the rest will be of very uncertain duration; and while it lasts, he will perceive it by many a token to be mere outside. He will be afraid perpetually, that some turn of affairs may take away from him the advantages of his baseness, and leave him only the ignominy of it. Or, how well soever he may escape, or how little soever he may value, the shame of this world; that of the next can neither be avoided nor contemned.

There can be no doubt then, but reputation deserves a very great regard. And therefore I proceed,

II. To warn you against shewing an over great regard to it.

Many seem to think, that a fair appearance is all they want: and accordingly take little care to support it by reality. But, without the latter, the former will quickly be seen through. And in the mean time, while few or none else knows them, their knowledge of themselves, and perpetual fears that others will find them out, must surely leave them very small pleasure in *having*, as the Scripture expresses it, *a name that they live, and being* in truth *dead**.

Many more, if they are guilty of nothing which the world thinks enormous, imagine they are quite as good as they need to be: forgetting, that *the Lord*

* Rev. iii. 1.

*seeth not as man seeth**, but often *that, which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God*†, who knows the secret springs, whence every word and action flow. Let us reflect then, that we are to approve our lives and hearts, not merely to our fellow-creatures; but to our Maker, who is perfect in holiness: that we may indeed *have whereof to glory before men; but* we can *not before God*‡; *in whose sight shall no man living be justified*§ by his own works. *Blessed is he to whom faith* in Christ, productive of continual study to amend and improve, *is counted for righteousness:* for *to him the Lord will not impute sin*‖.

But a still worse degree, if possible, of immoderate regard to our reputation is, when, to raise or preserve it, we transgress our duty. And it is surely a strange perverseness in human nature, that, though fear of disesteem, with every other motive added to it, is frequently insufficient to keep us from acting wrong; yet, on other occasions, that fear alone, in opposition to every other motive, is abundantly sufficient to keep us from acting right. Custom and fashion have brought some parts of morals, and almost the whole of piety, into utter disgrace. At least too many either imprudently chuse, or unhappily fall into such acquaintance, that they must lose their character with them, unless they will throw off their virtue and religion. No wonder if poor thoughtless creatures often sink under this temptation. *But woe to those, by whom the offence cometh*¶: who, not content to be vicious and profane themselves, add unprovoked, the further and greater wickedness of

* 1 Sam. xvi. 7. † Luke xvi. 15. ‡ Rom. iv. 2.
§ Ps. cxliii. 2. Rom. iii. 20. Gal. ii. 16. iii. 11.
‖ Rom. iv. 5—8. ¶ Matth. xviii. 7.

persecuting others by ridicule and invective into the same guilt. A persecution however far from being formidable enough to afford any tolerable excuse for such as yield to it. The vain, and shewy, and bold, who call themselves the world, and pretend to dispose of contempt and applause as they will, have it not so entirely by any means in their own hands, as they would seem. For, besides that the nature of things cannot be altered; were the numbers of such persons larger than it is, yet their weight is not answerable to it. And though the wise and good may, in proportion, be few; yet their judgment is, and will be, respected by many. So that whoever is truly disposed to be pious and virtuous will never want competent protection, if he doth but seek for it by cultivating proper friendships; but let the generality be ever so bad, will gain, upon the whole, more reputation than he loses, by adhering to his duty.

Yet, supposing this were otherwise, it should be considered, that the esteem of the worthless is very ill purchased at the price of becoming like them: and that the most fatal consequences daily proceed from persons being led by the folly of others, rather than their own good sense, and that of their discreeter and more experienced friends. But above all, it should be considered, how *small a thing it is to be judged of man's judgment*, when *he that judgeth us is the Lord**: who hath expressly said, what he will assuredly verify, *them that honour me, I will honour: and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed*†. Seldom will this fail in the present life; but never in the next: when *they, who sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake: some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*‡. Therefore, notwithstand-

* 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. † 1 Sam. ii. 30. ‡ Dan. xii. 2.

ing all the censures of this world, *let us run with patience the race that is set before us: looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God**.

Another case, in which, to preserve a character with their acquaintance, persons will do what every one else, and they themselves often, see to be wrong, is that of party-wickedness. Very frequently prejudices of education, worldly interest, vehemence of temper hurry them into it. But frequently also, their sole inducement is, that if they should stop short, their friends would look coldly upon them, and think meanly of them; and they cannot bear the reproach of not having been true to their side. What a wretched principle now is this! and yet tolerably good persons will be carried strange lengths by it: and others, any lengths whatever. We find in St. John, that on hearing our Saviour's discourses, *many among the chief rulers* of the Jews, inwardly *believed on him, but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God*†. Now just the same thing, which got the better of their conviction in this respect, gets the better of most men's in one respect or another: and they will not reflect, that as the temptations to raise or preserve a reputation by joining in the excesses of party, are often the most trifling, and easiest to be resisted, that can be; so, when the trial is harder, the duty is still the same; but the victory will be the more honourable, and the reward the greater.

A further instance, and a very criminal one, of

* Heb. xii. 1, 2. † John xii. 42, 43.

preferring the good opinion of others to their own conscience is, when persons, having been guilty of some folly or sin, will be guilty of almost any thing to cover it, rather than expose themselves. At one time they will immediately commit a very great fault to conceal a very small one. At others, they will begin, for that purpose, only with what seems a pretty harmless transgression. But that doth not succeed, perhaps entangles them yet worse: and so they are drawn on, till instead of confessing at first a single error, they are shamefully convicted at last of many. But if they could, by such means, escape ever so clear, these are not means, by which they ought to escape. Even an innocent person hath no right to use other than innocent methods for his defence: much less is having done one bad thing an excuse for doing a second. So far indeed as honest prudence will hide our disgrace, we are doubtless in the right to employ it. But if that will not suffice; what we have deserved we must patiently undergo, as a just correction, and salutary discipline to produce repentance. There lies our way back: and it is in vain to seek for any other. If we are disposed to take this only right course, all good persons will think it a duty strictly binding them (for indeed it is an important one) to make our return as easy to us, as possible: never to reproach us more with what we have heartily condemned ourselves for; but hold us in that honour, of which a true penitent may sometimes deserve a higher degree, than those who have never offended. And though the world should, as probably it will, do us this justice but imperfectly: yet bearing, in a virtuous manner, whatever shame our faults may bring upon us in this life, will contribute to increase our glory in the next.

One other bad way of aiming at reputation, which must be mentioned, is, when we demolish that of others, to raise our own, and build it on the ruins. Every one feels how grievous this injury is, when done to himself: and therefore knows the wickedness of doing it to his neighbour. Nor truly is the folly much less. Let another person's character in any respect be thought or proved ever so contemptible or so bad, mine continues but just what it was. And as for any hope, that it may be the more admired, when the other is lowered; on the contrary, it will be observed, who hath taken pains to lower it. And they, who are known to give such treatment, generally meet, as they well deserve, with a double share of it. Candour towards all, of whom we speak, is the true art of obtaining it towards ourselves: whereas *he that hath shewed no mercy, shall,* both from God and man, *have judgment without mercy**.

But besides those, who are led into any of these sins by an undue fondness for reputation; they also are blameable, who allow it to give them too much uneasiness. A good name is indeed the most valuable of all earthly things: but, like the rest of them, may be the subject of too much anxiety. If we are not esteemed by every body as we ought; if unjust imputations are thrown, and, for a time, rest, upon us, nay, should it happen to be a considerable time, provided it be not our fault, let us make it as light a misfortune as we can. Perhaps it is for having done our duty, that we are traduced; and what is our case then? *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake*†. Or, supposing the occasion to be not so meri-

* James ii. 13. † Matth. v. 11.

torious; yet it is some alleviation, that these things, in such a world as the present, are of course to be expected. We live among persons that will detract and misinterpret: and truly we are too prone to do like them. Besides, without any ill disposition, they mistake our attainments and accomplishments, we mistake theirs, and it cannot be otherwise. Doubtless we should avoid both making and occasioning such mistakes as far as we can. But when we have done our best, it is no more to be hoped that the most excellent person upon earth should have from all mankind a perfectly good report, than that the most regular person upon earth should at all times enjoy perfectly good health. Proper care, generally speaking, will secure us tolerably in both respects; at least will recover us again. And, as our health may sometimes be the better afterwards for having gone through a sharp fit of sickness: so may our character for suffering a severe trial. At least, such an exercise of our patience and meekness, if we preserve them, will do us a great deal more service, than the loss of a little esteem can do us harm. But it must be said again, that let persons only be virtuous and discreet, mild and humble, peaceful and charitable; that is, let them be truly good, and use but common precautions, that *their good be not evil spoken of**: and they will seldom fail of supporting a fair reputation.

As for a high one, that is not so easy to be gained: but neither is it so proper to be much desired. He indeed who is conscious, that, were his merit known, it would enable him to be singularly useful, may and should, if he is sure that this is both true and his true motive, strive earnestly to be conspicuous; but we are strangely apt to deceive ourselves in each of

* Rom. xiv. 16.

these points. And, if we have little more than self-gratification in view: vehement solicitude, in most cases, gives more uneasiness, than success gives pleasure. But solicitude for fame hath this further unhappiness, that, as very few have really any considerable title to it, most of the candidates for it must be disappointed: and so much the more certainly the more forward they are in their pretensions. For in proportion as we betray that weakness, we strongly tempt the world, not only to withhold the esteem which we deserve, but even to withdraw that which they had bestowed upon us. And further, if persons will affect to raise themselves to a vast height in popular opinion, though it should provoke nobody to pull their building down, it would in all likelihood, after a while, overturn of itself, or sink under its own weight. Our business therefore is to take the utmost care, that our foundation be solid: but a lofty superstructure is rather to be feared than wished.

And, besides the imprudence of the thing, it is really injustice to demand of the world more regard than we have a right to, and charge them with what they do not owe us. Nor is even this the worst of the case. Persons, who claim too much, are frequently driven to unfair and even criminal methods of getting their claim allowed: and there are many in the world, who would have deserved a very good name, if they had not been too earnest and too hasty for a great one. Here then, the truly valuable reputation is lost in pursuit of a shadow, which is seldom overtaken. To be admired is what we long for: to be disliked and despised is what we usually get. Or, if we succeed better, perhaps the passion to which we make so costly a sacrifice, is only that of being celebrated for some errant trifle: though indeed, be

it what it will, every thing is a trifle, compared to a right state of mind and right conduct of life. The reputation of making these things our study is what we should aim at: and as, in virtue, the chief point is, to do nothing ill; so, in character, it is to have nothing ill said of us. After that, it cannot but be desirable to have good said; and, in the main, to know it. But a general and a slight knowledge is quite sufficient. We may have full as much pleasure from that, as will be of any use to us. And listening after particulars, and wanting to hear a great deal of ourselves, both is wrong and leads wrong. They, whose praise is worth having, we may be sure, will never give us a large quantity of it before our faces. And therefore such as do, either are bad or weak persons themselves, or think us so. At least they take the ready way to make us so. For there is not upon earth a more ensnaring temptation, than that of too fond a self-complacency. Correcting our many and great faults is our proper employment: delighting in our own praises and imagined excellencies, a very unsafe and pernicious one. Let it be our care then to mind our work *by* an humble and *patient continuance in well-doing*: and as to our reward, the less eager we are for it in this world, the more abundantly we shall receive, in the next, *glory, and honour, and immortality* *.

* Rom. ii. 7.

SERMON XVI.

GAL. VI. 15.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

THESE words relate to that first dispute amongst Christians, whether the law of Moses was still to be observed: which, though it hath long been out of question, and now perhaps the difficulty seems to be only, how the observation of such a law could ever be required at all, was yet a very natural subject of controversy, and plainly a very important one, when our religion began to spread in the world: and there is such perpetual reference to it in St. Paul's epistles, that they have been greatly misunderstood for want of carrying it in mind. And therefore, I shall, in two discourses on these words,

I. Vindicate the justice and goodness of God, in distinguishing the Jews by a peculiar covenant:

II. Give an account of the expiration of that covenant, and its ceasing to oblige or avail any part of mankind:

III. Shew, what alone can avail men; and explain the phrase of *a new creature,* by which the Apostle here expresses it.

I. I shall vindicate the justice and goodness of Providence, in distinguishing the Jews, from the rest of the world, by a peculiar covenant.

God is no respecter of persons: but in every age and *nation, they who feared him and worked righteous-*

ness, have always been *accepted with him* *. The rewards of innocence, had man continued innocent, would have extended to the whole human race: as did the sad consequences of our first parents' fall. From these God equally relieved all their descendants: and received them into a second covenant of grace and forgiveness, on the equitable terms of a sincere though imperfect obedience, having for its principle, the belief more or less explicit, in proportion as revelation was, that *he is, and is a rewarder of them that seek him* †. This faith saved Noah, *the preacher* and practiser of *Righteousness* ‡, with his family, when *all flesh* besides, having *corrupted their way* §, were destroyed by the deluge: that, after so exemplary a punishment of sin, the world might begin anew from that good man, with better hopes of their observing for the future the laws of the Almighty. Again, to all the descendants of Noah, without exception, God equally delivered his precepts and his promises: nor made any distinction amongst them, till they had made one amongst themselves, by revolting in great numbers from true religion to idolatry and wickedness. And then, as he had enabled them to *see* originally, *from the things that were made, his eternal power and Godhead* ‖; as he had formed them to *be a law to themselves* ¶, by the authority of natural conscience within them; as he had superadded such strong manifestations of his acceptance of piety and virtue, and his abhorrence of sin: what ground could there have been for complaint, if he had left them to observe, or neglect at their peril, the notices already given them; without interposing any farther to direct them in this world; only reserving for the next

* Acts x. 34, 35. † Heb. xi. 6. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 5.
§ Gen. vi. 12. ‖ Rom. i. 20. ¶ Rom. ii. 14.

such rewards or punishments, as were suitable to their behaviour? And yet there is reason to think, from occasional intimations in Scripture, that warnings and instructions from Heaven were still frequently vouchsafed to mankind.

But one man in particular, Abraham, and his descendants, God was pleased to bless, beyond others, with communications of his will: and admit into a covenant of peculiar favour: which to many hath appeared a preference very partial, and unkind to the rest of the world. But would it have been kinder to bestow this favour on none, than on some? The rest of the world were not in a worse condition than before, though the Jews were in a better. God did not abandon the general care of mankind, when he took that people into his more especial protection. The other nations of the earth had still a right to all the old promises of mercy, though the Jews had new ones given them. Accordingly we find, after the call of Abraham, Melchizedeck, a Gentile, not only an acceptable worshipper himself, but a *priest* to others *of the most high God* *: and such a one, whose priesthood more fully resembled our blessed Lord's, than that of Aaron did. Again we find that holy man Job, though a Gentile, also, fully equal in God's esteem to any of those, who were distinguished for his chosen people, by the marks of his covenant.

Still, if, upon this, we are asked the question, which the Apostle supposes to be put, *What advantage then hath the Jew?* We answer with him: *Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God* †. From the very time of Abraham's call, he and his posterity had fuller notifications of God's will, and stronger instances of

* Gen. xiv. 18. † Rom. iii. 1, 2.

his providential care, than other men. But from the time, when Moses appeared amongst them, they had unheard-of demonstrations of divine power, exerting itself for their deliverance and protection; and a visible appearance of the divine glory, leading them from the land of bondage to that of promise. They had a law delivered to them, with inexpressible solemnity, by the mouth of God himself: and though it may seem hard to account for some part of it, especially to the unlearned, at the present distance of above three thousand years; yet, so far as we have the means of judging, it even now shews itself, on the whole, admirably fitted, in their circumstances, to preserve them from the idolatry and immoralities of their neighbours, and establish amongst them the belief and practice of true religion: to convince them of their inability of fulfilling a perfect obedience, and therefore their need of God's mercy; to prefigure, by the appointment of a ceremonial service, a spiritual one to come; and by the institution of typical sacrifices to be offered daily, the true and efficacious sacrifice and priesthood of that person, through whom pardon and grace were derived to mankind. Then, besides the establishment of such a law amongst them, God was perpetually exciting them to good, and deterring them from evil; by the interposition of an extraordinary providence, to reward their obedience, or punish their disobedience; and by the warnings and exhortations of prophets, raised up successively, who also both explained and improved the instructions, which Moses had given them.

These were doubtless great advantages: but that other nations had not the same, is no more an objection against the divine justice and goodness, than that all nations or all men at present have not in all re-

spects the same advantages, that some have. It suffices, that of each shall be required *according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not* *. But as to every thing beyond this, God is master of his own gifts: and we are incompetent judges how he ought to dispose of them. Yet in the disposal, of which I am speaking, we may trace evident footsteps of wisdom, and extensive mercy. While the rest of the world was falling into superstition and idolatry, Abraham distinguished himself by a faithful practice of true religion: and therefore was properly a distinguished object of divine favour. He was careful also to educate his family in the same principles; as God himself bears him witness. *For I know Abraham; that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment* †. It was therefore no groundless preference, but a most reasonable proceeding; to build on the foundations already laid and remaining; and reward persons, found to be so well disposed, by conferring on them further privileges; of which, with all their faults, they were much likelier to make a good use, than any of their more corrupted neighbours.

Yet to these likewise, and to all men, God had gracious intentions in every thing, which he did for his peculiar people. One of the first promises made to Abraham, was, that *in him and in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed* ‡. This indeed received not its full accomplishment, till our Saviour, the great blessing of all nations, came. But it was in some measure verifying continually, from the day it was made. Had all men been left to themselves

* 2 Cor. viii. 12. † Gen. xviii. 19.
‡ Gen. xii. 3. xviii. 18. xxii. 18.

at that time, the knowledge of true religion might have been every where lost. But securing the profession of it amongst the descendants of Abraham, was preserving a witness for God upon earth, and that in a part of it, perhaps as well peopled and as well esteemed, as any then known. There they *shone* forth first in Canaan, then in Egypt, *as lights in a dark place* *, to attract the eyes and direct the steps of the well-disposed. And this is a benefit of great consequence. For truth proposed is much more easily perceived, than without such proposal it is discovered. And when the Almighty brought them back from Egypt to Canaan again, by such amazing miracles as the Scripture relates, these were so many loud declarations from Heaven to mankind, concerning their duty: nor have we reason to doubt, but many were alarmed and convinced by their means; which indeed is expressly mentioned, as one end proposed by them: *And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord* †. Accordingly there *went out*, we read, *a mixed multitude with* ‡ the *Israelites:* and who could they be, but such as were brought to believe in the true God? for worshippers of false Gods they were not to suffer amongst them. Again, soon after this, Jethro, a man of high rank, and therefore probably of great influence, amongst the Midianites; how strongly doth he declare, what effect these wonders had on him? *And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hands of the Egyptians—Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods* §. Further still: wherever we find in the law, as we do very frequently, mention of the *strangers, that should sojourn in the land of Israel;*

* 2 Pet. i. 19. † Exod. vii. 5.
‡ Exod. xii. 38. § Exod. xviii. 10, 11.

these were many of them indeed no proselytes to the whole of the Jewish covenant, but all of them worshippers of the Maker of Heaven and earth only. And though by the wise direction of God, Moses prohibited the admission of idolaters amongst the people; yet by the same direction he enjoined the utmost humanity and tenderness to all, that preserved the religion of the children of Noah or of nature, in any tolerable degree uncorrupted. In the same spirit, Solomon too puts up an earnest petition for such in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple. *Moreover concerning a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country, for thy name's sake: (for they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm:) when he shall come, and pray towards this house; hear thou in Heaven thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all the people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel* *.

Nor were the Jews of service only in their flourishing state, to support true religion in the world; but under their afflictions and captivities they spread it much further, than they could before. Whilst they were their own masters in their own land, the peculiar institutions of their law considerably lessened the freedom of their intercourse with strangers. And these restraints, though extremely necessary, as it very plainly appeared, to preserve the purity of their religion, were otherwise great hindrances to the propagation of it. But when they were led captive into the lands of their enemies, and the punishment of their sins had given them a steadier zeal for their duty; then they became extensively useful to the

* 1 Kings viii. 41—43.

nations, amongst whom necessity mixed them; as both the reasonableness of their faith, compared with heathenism, was easy to be seen: and as prophecies fulfilled, or miracles performed in their favour, could not but recommend the worship of that Being, whom they served. By these means, their conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, was brought to declare him, *God of gods, and Lord of kings, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment* *. On these accounts did Darius the Mede decree, *that in every dominion of his kingdom, men should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever* †. And Cyrus, whom Isaiah had foretold by name, above one hundred years before his birth, for the restorer of the people from their captivity, acknowledged by a written proclamation, sent through his whole empire, that the God of the Jews had *given him all the kingdoms of the earth* ‡.

Nor is there sufficient ground to think, that these notices of true religion were soon lost again. On the contrary, from them proceeded very probably the great reformation made in the notions of the eastern part of the world, by Zoroaster: whose doctrine and form of worship, was the purest that the heathen knew. And many have apprehended, not without specious appearances of reason, that almost the whole knowledge of God, which the Greek philosophers had, was derived to them, ultimately, if not immediately, from the revelations made to the Jews. But however that might be; it is certain, that after the time of Alexander, this nation was diffused wider through the world; and, in every city which they inhabited, erected synagogues for divine worship, and for reading and explaining the holy Scriptures; to

* Dan. ii. 47. iv. 37. † Dan. vi. 26. ‡ Ezra i. 1, 2.

which resorted, as we find in the New Testament, many devout persons amongst the Gentiles, who had learned from the Jews to fear God. And thus, as Isaiah foretold, did the *law go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem**, conveying such degrees of light to all nations around, as prepared them to receive the *Sun of righteousness*, when in the fulness of time he *arose, with healing in his wings*†.

But though they were instruments of good to the world, they fell at length themselves into pernicious errors. Being distinguished by the observances of their law from other nations, they grew so wrongly vain of those distinctions, which in reality were mortifying proofs of their unfitness to be trusted without restraints, that they placed all the value of their religion in the outworks of it; and despised and hated the rest of mankind, whom this separation of theirs was intended to instruct and serve. Again, having promises made to them of a prince of the house of David, whom all people were to obey, they absurdly imagined, notwithstanding many evidences in their own Scriptures to the contrary, that this was to be, not a spiritual kingdom, influencing men's hearts, and protecting them from sin, and rewarding them with eternal happiness: but a temporal one, like those of this world, the honours and profits of which they should share, and tyrannize over the earth. So that when their expected Messiah came, finding him not to answer these vain and wicked hopes, they rejected and *crucified the Lord of glory*‡. Thus then did the Jews, after *preaching* for so many ages *to others*, become themselves *cast-aways*§: and

* Isaiah ii. 3.
† Mal. iv. 2.
‡ 1 Cor. ii. 8.
§ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

have continued ever since under visible marks of divine displeasure. Yet they perform to this day the office, to which they were at first appointed, of bearing witness to true religion: being preserved a distinct people though dispersed through the world, for so long a time, as no one besides from the creation ever was, in like circumstances; and demonstrating all the while the uncorruptness of those books, in which both they and we believe, and from which, in a great measure, we prove the truth of our religion, against themselves, as well as other infidels. Nor is this the whole service of the same kind, to which they are destined. For in God's good time, they shall give a new and illustrious, (and who knows how seasonable?) attention to Christianity, by their conversion; and the *receiving of them* again into the church shall be as *life from the dead* *. For so their own prophets have foretold, that God *will pour on them the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn: and in that day shall be a fountain opened to them for sin and for uncleanness: they shall call on his name, and he will hear them: he will say, it is my people; and they shall say, the Lord is my God* †.

Thus I have given you, I hope, a sufficient vindication of the divine justice and goodness in distinguishing the Jews by a peculiar covenant. And now I proceed,

II. To speak concerning the expiration of the covenant and its ceasing to oblige or avail any part of mankind. You will naturally understand me to mean, that such things only ceased, as were peculiar to the Mosaic dispensation: whether ceremonies in

* Rom. xi. 15. † Zech. xii. 10. xiii. 1. 9.

religion, or methods of proceeding in civil government. For what all men were bound to before the law of Moses, they were certainly bound to, afterwards. And wherever that law was merely an explanation of the law of nature, the explanation was a just and authorized one, and ought to be followed by as many, as come to the knowledge of it.

But the Jewish converts to Christianity, who were the first it had, and, though not the majority of that people, yet a large number, were inclined to carry the matter much farther than this. They were indeed humble and reasonable enough to receive Jesus for the Messiah: but still they were proud enough to think, that he was sent only to themselves. Accordingly the Apostles for some time preached the Gospel to none, but their own nation. And when St. Peter was satisfied by a vision from Heaven of the duty of doing otherwise, they that were of the circumcision blamed him for what he had done: till, having an account laid before them of the authority he went upon, *they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life* *. But when this difficulty was over, another very great one was immediately started; whether he had granted it on any other terms, than their observing the Jewish law: on which point was held a council at Jerusalem, as you may read, Acts xv. where after the matter had been thoroughly debated, the Apostles, elders, and brethren, directed by the Holy Ghost, unanimously determined, that since the Jews had never been able to keep their own law in strictness: and therefore could not themselves be saved, but through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and since the Gentiles, without the law, had not only been purified by the same faith, but had received the same

* Acts xi. 18.

gifts of the Holy Ghost, with the Jews; this was evidence enough, that they were accepted in their present condition, as the prophets had intimated they should, and therefore it was needless and unjust to lay a new yoke upon them, which they had never been enjoined before to undertake, nor would be able to bear now.

But even after this, one doubt remained still, whether the Jews at least ought not to continue observing their own law. For it had been declared in the Old Testament an ordinance to endure *for ever* *. And our Saviour himself had not only, pursuant to its directions, been circumcised in his infancy, but throughout his life was obedient to every precept of the Mosaic covenant: and therefore it might seem requisite, that all his disciples of that nation should be so too. Now considering this notion immediately and openly, must, considering how fond the Jews were of their religious ceremonies, have proved a great hindrance to their embracing the faith of Christ. And therefore he did not apprise his very Apostles clearly at first of his whole intention, as to these matters; but told them, that *he had many things to say unto them, which then they could not bear; but that when the spirit of truth shall come, he would guide them into all truth* †. And after they were more fully instructed, they exercised great prudence and patience towards their countrymen: permitting, and even practising along with them, for a while, what they knew to be unnecessary; and gently loosening their deeply-rooted prejudices. For, when examined with care, they will evidently appear to be nothing more than prejudices. The phrase, *for ever*, used concerning the continuance of the law, is used in

* Exod. xii. 14, &c. † John xvi. 12, 13.

that law itself concerning very small periods of time; the term of a man's life, the term of fifty years and less: in short, it means no more, than this; that what is appointed shall be done, so long as the state of things, to which the appointment refers, shall last. And, therefore, notwithstanding such words; when circumstances visibly alter, God may as justly and as wisely repeal any of his laws, as men do many of theirs, into which the same, and like words, have been inserted. Now the coming of Christ made a most evident and material alteration. It was indeed very fit, that to shew himself perfectly obedient, and prevent all possibility of cavil against him on that head, he should fulfil the whole righteousness of the covenant, under which he was born. But when he had exhibited the substance of those good things, of which the legal ceremonies were shadows; and completed all that the Mosaic dispensation prefigured, one great end of its existence plainly ceased. When men were grown capable, as God saw they were by that time, of a freer, and more spiritual, and manly service, instead of those formal restraints to keep them from going wrong, and those outward carnal ordinances to strike their imaginations, under which they had been placed in the earlier ages, compared by the Apostle to a state of childhood *: then a second design of the law ceased. And when the time came, in which God judged it proper, that the Jews, who had been distinguished from the Gentiles to preserve true religion in the world for their common benefit, should be reunited to them, that they might practise it together, and *be one fold under one shepherd;* then the third end of the law ceased, and *breaking down the walls of partition* †, that is, taking away the ceremonies that

* Gal. iv. 1, &c. † Eph. ii. 14.

separated them, contributed much, not only to the uniformity and beauty of Christianity, but to the preservation of harmony and love, and the avoidance of jealousy and complaint, amongst its professors: besides, that indeed many of the institutions of Moses were calculated for the use only of one small nation, as that nation to which he prescribed them, was; and neither could possibly be observed by all mankind, nor can be observed by the Jews in their present dispersion.

Yet, weighty as these considerations were, many continued unmoved by them: and insisted, that all men must keep the Jewish law; for that, without it, faith in Christ would not save them. And this is the doctrine, which St. Paul in his epistles so zealously confutes, as dishonourable to, and inconsistent with, the Gospel. He there shews, that Jews, as well as Gentiles, are sinners; and, far from meriting future happiness, by their good deeds, can escape future punishment for their bad ones only through God's mercy, which Christ hath procured for them, and revealed to them: that the law of Moses requires perfect obedience; and, after disobedience, makes no provision for pardon, but through him, whom its sacrifices presignify: that therefore, if they sought for justification by their legal works, as they appeared to do, they could not be justified at all; and, if they sought it by the grace of Christ, that singly would be sufficient: and it was doing it a gross injury, to imagine, that when the substance was come, the assistance of the shadow was requisite, to make it effectual: that *Faith had* not only saved the earlier patriarchs, but even *been imputed* to Abraham, the father of the Jews themselves, *for righteousness* *,

* Rom. iv. 3. 22, 23.

and a promise had been made him, that *in his seed all nations should be blessed,* before the very first part of the law, circumcision, was appointed; and hundreds of years before the rest of it had a being: and therefore the same faith, only rendered more explicit, might well have the same effect, after the law was taken away: which now only obscured the building, it had helped to raise.

These things make the principal subject of some of his epistles, particularly that to the Romans, and this to the Galatians; throughout the rest he frequently alludes to them: and bearing them in mind, is carrying along with us the true key to understand his writings; and reconcile him with St. James, when the former saith, that *men are justified by faith, without the deeds of the law* *, and the latter, that *by works a man is justified, and not by faith only* †. St. Paul means, that believers in Christ, will be saved without the observance of the Mosaic law, or the perfect observance of the natural law, to which our sinful natures cannot attain: and St. James means, that believers in Christ will not be saved, by their faith singly, without a sincere, though imperfect, observance of the precepts of the Gospel. For, it seems, there were some of wrong minds, who fell into an error, which indeed none of right dispositions could: and hearing the Apostles say, that men were *not under the law, but under grace* ‡, and that *Christ hath made us free* § from what the Jews were bound to; either imagined or pretended, that their Christian liberty exempted them from all law, and even from that of the civil magistrate. This, you see, was a most pernicious opinion. And not only St. James declared against it, and St. Peter too in his epistle, but

* Rom. iii. 28. † James ii. 24. ‡ Rom. vi. 14. § Gal. v. 1.

St. Paul is very express, that though, with respect to the Mosaic rites, Christians are without law, yet are they *not without law* in regard *to God, but under the law of Christ* *, and by his command, under that of men also.

This then is the doctrine of the New Testament; that according to the tenor of the Gospel, neither the observance of the Mosaic law will justify men, nor the non-observance of it condemn them; but that a thorough change of heart and life from evil to good, effected by the power of God's almighty grace, is the one thing needful: *for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature.* Now we in the present age are so entirely satisfied about the former of these points, that perhaps we think it lost time to hear any thing said upon it: though a way is thus opened, both to understand the sense, and vindicate the pertinence, of a considerable part of the New Testament: and likewise to convince reasonable persons, that other difficult passages of holy writ, if we knew the circumstances, to which they refer, might appear equally plain and unexceptionable. But then we are strangely apt, if not to disbelieve, yet to misunderstand the latter part of the Apostle's assertion in the text: and sometimes, it may be, to think more implied in it, but often less, than really is. And, by such mistakes, we come to rest our salvation on things, that will avail us little more than the observances of the Jews would them. Thus in almost the same manner, that they over-valued that ceremony, which was the entrance into their covenant, we over-value our baptism, which is the entrance into ours; and think well of our spiritual state, merely because a solemn promise was

* 1 Cor. ix. 21.

made in our names, of which we have lived in the breach almost ever since. Or if we can plead something more; perhaps it is a formal attendance on prayers and sermons and sacraments, without attention and without meaning: or it is the orthodoxy of a belief, that hath no influence on our practice; or the fervency of a zeal without knowledge, or without charity: it is our fits of repentance, and no amendment: our transitory warmth of good affections and fruitless purposes: our partial obedience to some precepts of God's law, with a gross neglect of others: or our imagined obedience to all, with a conceit of our own righteousness and merit that destroys all: these are the things on which multitudes rely; whereas nothing can secure us from final condemnation, but that which the Apostle calls *a new creature;* and which, God willing, shall be further explained to you the next opportunity. But in the mean time, as we must all be sensible, that we want something, and most of us, it may be feared, a great deal, of being such creatures as we ought; why should we postpone our reformation or improvement one hour longer? So many years have already passed over our heads; and what hath been done in them towards preparing for eternity? If enough to be accepted, let us thank God, and go on our way rejoicing, whatever our condition be in other respects: and press forward with redoubled earnestness, to obtain a double reward. If we have cause to doubt our state, there can be no doubt so important for us to clear up instantly. And if it be a bad one; if we have lived in the commission of sins, the neglect of duties, the wilful neglect of ony one duty; what a prospect have we before us, and what need to change it? Let us think of ourselves as well as we can; are we content, that

death and judgment should overtake us just such as we are; or have we not every one something to do, before we are ready? And if so, when shall it be done? Not a moment, beyond the present, are we sure of: and why should the one thing needful be deferred till the next? Delays are nothing but cheats, that we put upon our souls: and never, I believe, did any one's resolution of amendment hold good, who did not resolve to amend immediately. If then you mean it at all: *now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation* *. And may God, who now calls upon you by me, grant, that *in this our day we may all know the things that belong to our peace,* lest they be for ever *hid from our eyes* †.

* 2 Cor. vi. 2. † Luke xix. 42.

SERMON XVII.

GAL. VI. 15.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

In discoursing on these words you may remember I proposed,

I. To vindicate the justice and goodness of God, in distinguishing the Jews by a peculiar covenant:

II. To give an account of the expiration of that covenant, and its ceasing to oblige or avail any part of mankind:

III. To shew, what alone can avail men: explaining for that purpose, the phrase of *a new creature*, by which the Apostle here describes it.

I have finished the two first of these heads; and shall proceed, without any repetition, to the third: a point the more worthy of your careful attention, both as the subject itself is of the utmost importance, and as the figurative expressions used in relation to it, here and elsewhere in Scripture, are not only despised and ridiculed by the profane, as unintelligible or extravagant: but, through inconsiderateness or prejudice, too commonly misunderstood by the serious; who from thence fall into notions, which, if they are not rectified, may greatly affect, often their present peace, and sometimes their future happiness.

To explain the new creation, it will be requisite to

§

begin with the old. *God created man in his own image* *, holy and pure: and unquestionably furnished him with sufficient powers and motives to continue such. But by his miserable fall he became prone to sin, as well as mortal. His primitive uprightness and strength of mind, were by that pernicious indulgence depraved and weakened: his affections and appetites grew irregular: and his now *corruptible body pressed down his soul* †. The unhappy disorders, which he had thus introduced into his own frame, he must of consequence transmit, as an hereditary disease, to his posterity: and accordingly in fact, a tendency to evil, and inability of doing good, is experienced, more or less, by every one that comes into the world. Then as men grow up, instead of correcting their bad inclinations, they never fail to cherish them, if left to their own ways: by which means they become worse of course; generally so much worse, that the nature, which they received at their conception, may be accounted virtuous and good, in comparison with that second nature, which by evil habits they form to themselves. And thus doubly changed, by original defilement and actual transgression, far from continuing to be the creatures which God first made, and preserving that likeness to their heavenly Father, which would give them the title of his sons, they are justly called in Scripture the *children of the devil* ‡, and therefore the *children of wrath* §.

The divine goodness, however, was desirous to relieve mankind from the ill effects, not only of Adam's sin but their own: and the divine wisdom provided a method of doing it, consistent with the honour of God's government, through the interposi-

* Gen. i. 27. † Wisd. ix. 15. ‡ 1 John iii. 10. § Eph. ii. 3.

[illegible] Redeemer: which method, from [illegible] was intimated to men sufficiently, [illegible]; and afterwards by degrees more [illegible]. But that he should be reconciled [illegible] wilfully remaining such, was quite impos- [illegible] and therefore, together with a provision of [illegible] on his part, there must also be a provision of [illegible] on the part of the offenders; and in these [illegible] things, inseparably united, the restoration of the [illegible] race to a state of happiness must consist. Accordingly we find them closely joined, not only in the more direct and formal declarations of Scripture concerning this momentous change, but in all the various images, under which it is represented.

Sometimes it is expressed by *adoption:* because that implies our being aliens and strangers, received into God's family and inheritance: but then it implies also an obligation to obey him, as dutiful sons. Elsewhere, by a stronger figure, it is called a *regeneration,* or, which means the same, a *new birth;* because it brings persons forth into a new state of things, where they are to act from other principles than they did before or would have done else, in another manner, with other expectations, and grow up to the maturity of another character. In some places again, the same happy change is described, as a *resurrection from the dead:* because it raises and restores men, both to the activity of a spiritual life now, and to the well-grounded hopes of eternal life hereafter. But the most emphatical phrase of all is that in the text, of *a new creature,* or creation. The inward condition of man, under the full effect of his first parents transgression, answers too exactly, and yet more after the addition of his own personal guilt, to that account in the beginning of the history of the old creation: *and the*

*earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep**. But it follows: *and God said, let there be light, and there was light*†. Thus the human soul, in the above-mentioned state, is unformed and disorderly, void of reason and rule, gloomy and comfortless; till *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness*‡, shine upon the dismal chaos, and produce in it new appearances and views of things; till he bring forth order from confusion, and form again in the heart the illuminating image of his own holy nature.

But here it must be observed, that, in some sense and degree, the Scripture expressions and privileges of a new birth and creation belong to all, who are admitted by baptism into the Christian covenant, though none are intitled to future happiness by them, but such as complete their right to them, if God allows them time for it, by performing, from a spirit of inward piety, the several obligations of the Gospel. When that is preached to Jews, or Heathens, every one who believes and is baptized, is *buried with Christ* in that sacred ordinance, *raised up to newness of life*§, and adopted of God for his child. When the infants of believers are baptized, they are, by the solemnity which Heaven hath appointed, *born again of water and the spirit*‖, into a better state, than that of nature. And till either sort of persons forfeit their claim by wilful wickedness; which it may be hoped some never do, though *in many things we offend all*¶; they continue heirs of everlasting life. And even when they fall under the dominion of sin; though, were they to die in that condition, future mercy would be their portion; and therefore, in

* Gen. i. 2. † Verse 3. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6.
§ Rom. vi. 4. ‖ John iii. 5. ¶ James iii. 2.

respect of any present title to their heavenly Father's inheritance, they are no longer children of God: as earthly sons or subjects, when they rebel, are no longer such, in respect of any right to the favour of their parents or princes: yet as, in other regards, those latter continue sons and subjects still; so the covenant with the former, by which they were made the children of God, subsists, notwithstanding their failure of duty, thus far, that not only by the terms of it, if they persist, they will be condemned, but by the terms of it also, if they repent, they will be pardoned. And neither the penitence, nor the forgiveness of those, who before were initiated into Christianity, and have not since rejected it, is ever expressed in the word of God by the phrase of the new birth or new creature, but these are appropriated almost, if not altogether, to our original admission into the Gospel state; into which we enter once for all, by one baptism, *the laver of regeneration.* Nicodemus, to whom our Saviour in St. John gives instructions on that head, was not then become a Christian. The Galatians, *of whom* St. Paul saith *he travaileth in birth again, until Christ be formed in them**, either had apostatized from the faith intirely, or wanted, not the whole, but the completion only of the new birth, by juster and fuller conceptions of the Gospel doctrine. Nor is there the least appearance elsewhere in the New Testament, of telling any professed believer, though he had sinned ever so grievously, that he must be born again; (otherwise the same person would be born again as often as he falls into any great wickedness, and recovers from it:) but that he must *repent, and do the first works*†, and *be renewed in the spirit of his mind*‡; which

* Gal. iv. 19. † Rev. ii. 5. ‡ Eph. iv. 23.

belongs, in its degree, to the best of good Christians. And therefore, though inculcating perpetually, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord**, is indispensably needful; yet preaching the necessity of being regenerated, as a thing still absolutely wanting to a great part of those, who call themselves disciples of Christ, is using a language, not conformable to that of Scripture, nor indeed of the primitive fathers, or the offices of our own Liturgy: which declares every person, who is baptized, to be, by that very act, *regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's church.* It is true, a different manner of speaking may be capable of a good interpretation, and should be interpreted as favourably, as there is room. But it is neither accurate, nor prudent, to depart from the authorized sense of the words of *sound doctrine:* and much less is it allowable to blame others for adhering to them.

The first and immediate meaning then of the Apostle in the text, we have cause to think, is, that under the Gospel, neither entering into the Mosaic covenant by the appointed form will do a man service, nor the want of it do him harm: and that being received, by baptism, into a new state of grace and mercy, is equally necessary, and equally sufficient, for Jew and Gentile. But then being admitted even into this state will avail us nothing finally, unless we live suitably to the laws of it. And as, in the natural world, God's preservation of things hath often been called a continual creation of them: so in the moral, the same notion is more evidently right. The complete sense therefore of the Gospel creation comprehends, not only the giving of spiritual life at first, but supporting it in us afterwards. And we shall

* Heb. xii. 14.

find the whole of our religious being, as well as the beginning of it, to deserve the name of the new creature on two accounts;

I. Of the power of God necessary to it.

II. Of the change in man's condition, made by it.

I. Of the power of God, necessary to it. Now this power he hath exerted, not only by giving us originally the light of reason and conscience, and superadding to this the directions and motives of external revelation; but by inwardly operating on our hearts through his spirit, exciting and forming us to piety and virtue, and restraining us from transgression, in such a manner, that whatever good we perform, and whatever evil we avoid, not we by our own strength do it, *but the grace of God, which is with us** : *by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God*† : *for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works*‡. This doctrine the Scripture throughout teaches. We know not indeed, how God influences our minds: for we know not, how he doth any thing. But assisting his fallen and weak creatures is so worthy of him; and the belief of that assistance is so productive of thankfulness and love, humility and pious resolution; that surely we must admit it on his plain testimony: and we can hardly lay too great a stress upon it, provided we are careful not to pervert it, either into a plea for our own negligence, or an imputation upon his justice.

If we imagine ourselves absolutely incapable of doing any thing towards our reformation from sin, or improvement in goodness; we excuse those who become and continue wicked, as having no means

* 1 Cor. xv. 10. † Eph. ii. 8. ‡ Verse 10.

given them to act otherwise; we charge their guilt upon God, for with-holding such means from them; and make it unjust in him to punish them for the worst things they do. For no punishment is just, where there is no fault: and it can be no fault to behave, as we never could help behaving. Besides, all the command and exhortations of Scripture, all its earnest reasonings and affectionate expostulations, have for their ground-work the supposition, that man is able, as he chuses, either to receive *the grace of God, which bringeth salvation**, or generally speaking to reject it. We own, the spiritual creation, as well as the natural, is in appearance wholly ascribed to God in some places of holy writ: but, in appearance also, wholly ascribed to man in others: as, *make you a new heart, and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel*†. And we are to understand the various texts of Scripture consistently: not to stretch figurative expressions, till we force them to contradict literal ones, and evident reason too: else, if we conclude, that because the wicked are described as *dead in sins*‡, they can take no step towards good; we must conclude also, that because the religious and virtuous are described as *dead to sin*§, they can take no step towards evil: which the very best of us all knows to be false. And likewise, if we argue thus, we must condemn or misinterpret many clear passages of the New Testament, besides: particularly that of St. Paul. *Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*‖. Still we readily grant that nothing of this can be done otherwise, than by the strength, which God furnishes: but he furnishes to every one, that hears the

* Tit. ii. 11. † Ezek. xviii. 31. ‡ Eph. ii. 1.
§ Rom. vi. 2. ‖ Eph. v. 14.

Gospel, strength sufficient. The true Scripture doctrine therefore is, that divine grace enables and excites men to do their duty: that some wilfully refuse to be guided by it, and fall; while others concur with it, and *work out their own salvation, God working in them both to will and to do**. But,

II. Our Christian life is also called a new creation, to express in a strong manner, how greatly our condition is changed by it for the better: according to that of the Apostle, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new*†. But here again, we must guard against mistakes.

It is not true, that, in strictness of speech, fallen man hath originally no principle of what is right left in him. If the whole was lost by the fall, somewhat hath by the general grace of God been restored since. For, though St. Paul saith, *In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing*‡, yet he saith of the same person, quickly after, *I delight in the law of God after the inward man*§. And he supposes even *the Gentiles* to *do*, in some cases, to some degree, *the things contained in the law*‖. Indeed experience proves, that notorious sinners have often a considerable mixture of worthy dispositions. We are not therefore to look on those dreadful pictures, which the sacred writers draw, of the most depraved of the heathen, as being just representations, without abatement, of the natural state of all mankind. But, however, that state is undoubtedly a bad one; destitute of sufficient strength, unintitled to pardon of sin, to supplies of grace, to reward of obedience: till God, in the covenant of baptism, affords us relief in all

* Phil. ii. 12, 13. † 2 Cor. v. 17. ‡ Rom. vii. 18.
§ Verse 22. ‖ Rom. ii. 14.

these respects; and so *translates us from the power of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son**. Here then begins our new creation or birth: and our remaining concern is, to behave as dutiful children to our heavenly Father; and by using the prescribed means of spiritual growth, be careful to arrive at fulness of stature and strength in Christ. The first creation was not completed in a moment, but gradually finished in the space of six days: after which, Adam was left to cultivate the garden, that God had planted. The second hath no certain time prescribed it: but advances faster or slower, with fewer or more frequent interruptions, to greater or less perfection, according as men lay hold on, or neglect, the assistances always ready for them.

Some are *trained up*, and walk from the first, *in the way, wherein they should go*†: and though guilty of many small errors, through infirmity and surprise, yet, avoiding great and wilful deviations, they advance continually to a happy end of their journey. Now these cannot well perceive any sudden change in the condition of their souls; for their improvement is usually very gradual: much less any change in it from bad to good; for it hath always been good from their earlier acquaintance with it. Too many indeed may imagine this falsely: but others, through God's mercy, may know it to be true, that they have always lived religiously, from genuine Christian principles. Like Timothy, *they have known the Holy Scriptures from children, which are able to make them wise unto salvation*‡. And such, far from having reason to doubt their acceptance with God, because they have never experienced grievous terrors and bitter sorrows, have the highest reason to rejoice,

* Col. i. 13. † Prov. xxii. 6. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

that they have found the *ways of wisdom pleasantness and peace**, from their very entrance upon them: and shall be rewarded in the end for a whole life, spent as it ought.

But far more commonly, men have committed heinous offences, or indulged themselves in the omission of important duties. And then more particular and deep repentance is necessary: followed by a change of dispositions within, as well as external behaviour: else their baptismal regeneration will only aggravate their guilt. But even the conversion of such is not always accompanied with extremely vehement agitations of mind: but these differ, according to their various tempers, and the free operations of the divine spirit. Nay, indeed, some feel the most tormenting agonies, yet harden their hearts against them and go on: while others are effectually amended by the influence of mild convictions and a calm concern. And whether it be a call loud as thunder, or whether it be *a still small voice*† that speaks: if we do but hearken to it, all is well.

Nor is the recovery of sinners always equally sudden. Some, like St. Paul, are awakened and enlightened instantaneously, throw off a habit of wickedness at one effort, and are changed that moment into newness of life. Others, after their first alarm, long maintain a doubtful struggle with their vicious inclinations: one while seeming to have fought the good fight successfully, then entangled anew in their former bondage: a painful and dangerous situation: out of which notwithstanding, through almighty grace, there are those who escape *into the glorious liberty of the children of God*‡. And to a third sort, whose disorders, though but too

* Prov. iii. 17. † 1 Kings xix. 12. ‡ Rom. viii. 21.

threatening, are less violent, health is restored by slow, and gentle, and almost imperceptible steps. Now it may be as impossible for these to fix the precise time, when their faith and penitence were carried just far enough to make them objects of God's forgiveness, as it often is to determine exactly the moment when the sun rises upon the earth, though it hath evidently been growing light a great while. Without question, as soon as any one hath that faith in Christ, which will produce a life of good works, he is justified by his faith alone, and his sins forgiven. But though God always knows this time exactly, men very often may not, or rather very seldom can. They may have comfortable hopes and persuasions, first weaker, then stronger: and yet, through mere humility, may entertain some doubts, not of the divine promises, but of their own qualifications, longer than they have cause. And these doubts may be graciously permitted, as very useful incitements both to diligence and caution. Our Bible no where teaches, that every one, who is forgiven, knows the hour of his forgiveness: or even knows with certainty, that God hath granted it. He must indeed, as he amends, perceive the alteration made in him: and in general, a pleasing hope and faith of sharing in the divine mercy must increase along with it: but he may still not be sure, whether it is yet complete enough to be a proof, that he hath obtained pardon. Some are *weak in faith* *: others are *strong* † and *abound in it* ‡. But conceiving ourselves to be of the latter sort, gives us no title to pass sentence against the former. And we should be very fearful of judging our brethren rashly; who, with all their modest apprehensions, may perhaps have as real,

* Rom. xiv. 1. † Rom. iv. 20. ‡ Col. iii. 7.

perhaps a greater interest in God's favour, than some of those, who declare them to have none. And yet, if these hard censures proceed, not from ill-will, or bitterness of spirit, but from the warmth of a well-meaning zeal, even the persons injured by them should think mildly, and in the main, well, of the authors of them, lest they retaliate hardship, while they complain of it.

But further, as the spiritual life may, in different persons, be attended with different degrees of evidence, it may likewise advance to different degrees of perfection. Indeed, when God created the heavens and the earth, he *saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good* *. Nor, in the new creation, is any part of what he doth defective. But even pious persons are wanting to themselves: and hence some of them come greatly short of others; and the best, of what they might and ought to have been. For, though all Christians are exhorted to perfection, and all real Christians labour after it, and, in God's gracious construction, finally arrive at it; and some have the title given them by way of eminence, on account of their uncommon proficiency: yet speaking strictly, *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* †; nor did even St. Paul think, *he had already attained, or was already perfect* ‡.

But here, as before, it is of the utmost importance not to err. They, who allow themselves in the habitual omission of any one known duty, or the habitual practice of any one known sin; they who have committed any single act of deliberate gross sin, without heartily repenting of it, and carefully avoiding it

* Gen. i. 31. † 1 John i. 8. ‡ Phil. iii. 12.

afterwards; are not good persons with imperfections, but wicked ones under guilt and condemnation. The imperfections of the good are of quite another kind: slight weaknesses, sudden surprises, inconsiderate failures, undiscerned unreasonableness in temper and behaviour; honestly watched against upon the whole, yet returning from time to time, are subjects of daily concern and general humiliation. Let no one therefore flatter himself, that because all men have their faults, he may wilfully indulge his without danger. Nor let any one be so absurdly cunning, as to think of making a near bargain in religion: and contriving to be just so good, as to escape future misery; and yet no better, than he needs must. Though we aim to do our utmost we shall be sure to fall beneath the rule of our duty: but, if we aim at less, we shall be too likely to fail of the acceptance of our Maker. True goodness includes in it the love of goodness. No one can be religious and virtuous in earnest, without sincerely desiring to be more so; and feeling the truth of what wisdom, in the son of Sirach, asserts of herself: *They, that eat me, shall yet be hungry; and they, that drink me, shall yet be thirsty: for my memorial is sweeter than honey; and mine inheritance, than the honey-comb* *. Such therefore, as are, perhaps in no respect, positively either vicious or profane, but negligent and thoughtless; willing to go to Heaven, with as little trouble, and as much indulgence, as ever they can; and, of the two, rather more afraid of being over good, than downright bad; are already, to speak the most favourable of them, in a very unpromising condition; and, unless they make haste to get into a better, will soon be in a worse.

Another thing still, to be observed concerning the

* Ecclus. xxiv. 20, 21.

new creation, is, that as it may be carried to different degrees of perfection, so it may be attended with different degrees of comfort. Nor is there any proof from Scripture or experience, that persons equally pious are filled in this world with equal joy and consolation. They, that have a greater share than ordinary of such delightful perceptions, ought undoubtedly, if the tenor of their lives afford cause for them, to be very thankful. But such as have the least, if *their hearts condemn them not*, may *have confidence towards God* *; and be assured, that the smallness of their present degree of comfort *shall work together* with *all* other *things for their* future *good* †. Indeed the very same persons, without any other change in their spiritual state, find, at times, elevations, depressions, insensibilities, for which they can only account by variations, visible or supposed, in their bodily health, or God's unsearchable will and pleasure. Again, very bad people too often *trust in themselves, that they are righteous* ‡; and rejoice on groundless presumptions; while, on the other hand, though the good must, in their composed hours, feel some satisfaction in the hope, that they are such; and therefore every one ought to reflect, whether he hath, on serious thought, felt that satisfaction, or not; yet the light of God's countenance hath been frequently withdrawn from some of the best of men, and *their souls disquieted within them* §. Nay, even our Saviour complained, that, in respect to the cheering influences of his presence, *God had forsaken him* ‖. So that no one can justly think well or ill of himself on such accounts as these. The Psalmist hath told us, that *they who sow in tears,*

* 1 John iii. 21. † Rom. viii. 28. ‡ Luke xviii. 9.
§ Psalm xlii. 6. ‖ Matth. xxvii. 46.

shall reap in joy: and *he that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him**. And the Prophet hath stated both this case, and its opposite. *Who is among you, that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, and compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow* †.

The only sure evidence therefore of the goodness of our condition, is the sincerity of an obedience, flowing from motives truly Christian. And accordingly, what the Apostle calls here in the text *a new creature,* he calls, in a parallel place of the preceding chapter, *faith working by love* ‡, and in another, *keeping the commandments of God* §. So that when he saith, the new creature will avail, and nothing else, he saith it on supposition of its being so completed, as to answer its end: which end unless we are careful to attain, by exerting the principles of the spiritual life conferred on us in baptism, and growing up in all Christian graces; however great a blessing in itself our sacramental regeneration is, it will be none to us: but we had better not have been born, better not have been new born, if it only intitles us to privileges, that we finally forfeit; and become, to use St. Jude's expression, *twice dead* ‖, our Saviour hath told us, that the *tree is known by its fruits* ¶. And *the fruits of the spirit* are the virtues of a holy life**.

* Psalm cxxvi. 6, 7. † Isaiah l. 10, 11. ‡ Gal. v. 6.
§ 1 Cor. vii. 19. ‖ Jude, verse 12. ¶ Matth. xii. 33.
** Gal. v. 22. Eph. v. 9.

If we experience these, we have a mark of our acceptance with God, which cannot deceive: all other marks, all other feelings, be they ever so lively, ever so pleasing, may. Doubtless, *if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his* *. Our pious disposition, our well-grounded comforts, all proceed from the Holy Ghost: and we can have neither, without perceiving them. But we may perceive them, without certainly knowing by the manner of the perception, that they are his work: it suffices, that, on the authority of Scripture, we believe they are. And Scripture hath no where taught us to distinguish, what impulses, or sensations within us, come from God, and what from a different source, by the mere strength and delightfulness of them. Without question, clear and joyful persuasions of our interest in the divine favour, if we have foundation to judge that we are intitled to them, are the greatest felicity, that we can enjoy in this world. But whoever relies on such persuasions alone, instead of examining what ground they stand upon, exposes himself to the utmost danger of being misled by a heated imagination, or a sinful confidence: of which kind of delusions the history of the church in all ages hath been full. And whoever determines either his own state towards God, or that of any one else, to be a bad one, for want of such tokens of its being a good one, contradicts the rule of holy writ. *Every one that doth righteousness, is born of him* †, and unwisely dejects himself, or uncharitably condemns his brother.

Let us therefore be very cautious not to fancy the paths of religion either narrower or broader, than they are: neither to *make the heart of the righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad; nor strengthen*

* Rom. viii. 9. † 1 John ii. 29.

the hands of the wicked, by promising him life * : for of both these errors we may be guilty at once. But in order to avoid both, let us form our notions of ourselves and others by God's unerring word, interpreted with the reasonableness and mildness of a truly Christian temper; and then we shall quickly discern, that the only sure test of good and bad persons is that, which St. John hath so solemnly delivered from above. *This then is the message, which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say, that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness,* that is, wickedness, *we lye, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,* if we studiously imitate the purity and holiness of our heavenly Father, *we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin* †.

* Ezek. xiii. 22. † 1 John i. 5, 6, 7.

SERMON XVIII.

ACTS VII. 59, 60.

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.
And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he feel asleep.

As the interests of religion and virtue require, that due regards be paid to the memory of pious and good persons; and as they who have laid down their lives for God and their duty, have given the strongest proofs of their attachment to the noblest cause: so the Christian church hath, from the beginning, shewn distinguished honours to those professors of its holy faith, who have sealed their testimony to it with their blood. The first martyr, or witness, of this kind, after the blessed Jesus himself, was St. Stephen, a man *full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost and of power and of wisdom* *, whose death is related in the text. And we find in the next verse but one, that *devout men carried him,* with decent solemnity, *to his burial,* and made great *lamentation over him;* undoubtedly mixed with equal triumph, that he had finished his course in so exemplary a manner; nor were they withheld from it by fear of the resentment, to which so public an instance of respect must provoke his murderers and all their adherents.

* Acts vi. 3. 5. 8. 10.

Two of the most ancient monuments of ecclesiastical history, that we have, excepting the New Testament, are the accounts of the martyrdom of Ignatius and Polycarp, both disciples of St. John, written at the time of their suffering, by the churches of Antioch and Smyrna, of which they were bishops. And in those they mention, as of course, their purpose of celebrating yearly the festival of their birth-days, of their entrance into a better life, for the commemoration of their excellent graces, and the incitement of others to imitate them. Thus did they provide, that *the righteous should be had in everlasting remembrance* *: and observed the more particular direction, given to that intent in the Epistle to the Hebrews: *Remember them which have* [*had*†] *the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end,* the event, *of their conversation.* The rest of the primitive churches appear to have followed the same rule: and each to have honoured the more eminent of their own martyrs, who had been usually their teachers also, by anniversary assemblies for preserving the reverence due to their characters, and offering up thanks to God for their examples.

But the increase of their numbers, and the adoption of the sufferers of one church into the liturgies of others, and the admission of eminently good persons, who had *not resisted unto blood* ‡, and the frequent grants, which in subsequent ages were made, of so high a distinction, with little care of previous inquiry, multiplied the returns of these solemnities very improperly and inconveniently. Then besides, a still greater evil was, that praises and panegyrics too soon

* Psalm cxii. 6. † So it should be translated, Heb. xiii. 7.
‡ Heb. xii. 4.

grew to be immoderate, and afterwards impious. In the vehemence of oratorical encomiums and exclamations, the saint was called upon as present, till by degrees he was thought so: and what at first was merely a bold and moving figure of speech, became at length in good earnest a prayer; which requested of a dead man who was unable to hear it, not only that he would intercede with God in behalf of his fellow-servants, but that he would himself bestow such blessings upon them, as no creature hath in his power. Things being found in this condition at the Reformation, it was necessary, both to abolish intirely these unlawful addresses, and to limit the original sort of commemorations to a moderate list of persons, indisputably worthy of them. Accordingly no day is appointed by our church for the celebration of any other, than the principal saints, mentioned in the New Testament, it being hard to stop, if more were added. And amongst these, St. Stephen is the only one, who stands solely on the foot of being a martyr: as indeed it was fit, that the foremost, the leader, of that *noble army* should be distinguished, and chosen, as it were, to represent the rest. Now we shall keep his festival in a due manner, if we make use of it to place before our thoughts,

I. The sinfulness of persecution for conscience sake.

II. The excellency of bearing it well.

I. The sinfulness of persecution for conscience sake.

Taking away the lives, the fortunes, the liberty, any of the rights of our brethren, merely for serving their Maker in such manner as they are persuaded they ought, when by so doing they hurt not human society, or any member of it, materially, is evidently incon-

sistent with all justice and humanity: for it is punishing those, who have not injured us; and who, if they mistake, deserve only pity from us. Nor is it less inconsistent with policy and common prudence. For thus many will be driven from amongst us, who might have been very useful: and such of the same opinion, as stay behind, will be tempted to become either open or secret enemies, in order to free themselves from the hardships which they suffer, and revenge themselves on the authors of them: from which motives have proceeded the bloodiest wars, the most shocking massacres, the most heinous barbarities, that have ever disgraced human nature. Or should men comply against their judgments, and live quietly; from being hypocrites in the great point of their religion, they will too probably grow dishonest in others. And though their posterity may at length be sincere; and so what we think truth be promoted in our part of the world: yet if the rest should be induced by our example to promote what they think truth, in the same way, it will by no means be a gainer on the whole. Fair argument and equitable behaviour are the natural methods of spreading it: and it will never thrive by any opposite ones. This being the case, imagining that God can enjoin religious cruelties, or fail to be displeased with them, is thinking so unworthily and absurdly of him, that few things are more surprising, than the wide extent and long prevalence of so monstrous an error. And nothing distinguishes this age and nation more to its honour, than its entertaining in general so right sentiments on the subject before us.

When and where persecution began, hath been controverted. Some have charged the Jews with giving the first example of it, by extirpating the Canaan-

ites, and punishing idolatry with death amongst their own people. But the Canaanites were extirpated, not for harmless religious opinions or observances, but for monstrous and unnatural cruelties and impurities, practised in their worship and out of it: by which, continued through many generations, their *iniquity*, being at length, as the Scripture expresses it, *full*; God appointed the Israelites, as appeared by the evidence of numerous miracles, to execute his vengeance upon them: which command was probably designed to give them a greater abhorrence of the like enormities; and certainly they were bound to obey it. But they neither claimed any right else to punish those nations; nor any right at all to punish other nations, though guilty of the same crimes.

Nor amongst themselves were they authorized to proceed criminally against any persons on account of their faith or devotions, excepting the adorers of the neighbouring false deities; or of the true one by an image. Now such of those deities, as had been men, had been such dangerous patterns of wickedness; and the service of them all was so full of detestable abominations, that paying them any honour must be of very bad consequences: but paying them those, which they were understood to claim, worse than Atheism itself. And setting up images of the true God had so strong and immediate a tendency to lower the reverence of him, and bring him down to a level with the rest, that the mischief was only one degree removed. Besides, it no way appears, that the Hebrew idolaters held it their duty to be such: but licentiousness, or mistaken policy, or love of novelty, or some wrong inducement of that sort, led them to adopt the divinities of their neighbours: still believing in Jehovah, though practically they forsook him. And therefore, as con-

science did not require their false worship, it was not injured by the prohibition of it. Nor must we forget, that God having condescended to be their supreme civil magistrate, as well as the object of their adoration; owning another God was treason, as well as idolatry: which never was the case of any one nation in the world besides.

It is therefore amongst the heathens, that we must look for the origin of real persecution. Yet, we confess, most of them tolerated, and even incorporated, a great variety of deities, and modes of worship: because they supposed, that the former might be all true, and the latter all acceptable. And therefore it was not readily concluded from a man's having a religion of his own, that he denied that of the state. But when there seemed cause to apprehend that he did, it was deemed, in some of the freest constitutions, a capital crime: as the known case of Socrates fully proves. There were indeed but few such punishments, because there were but few such offences, real or pretended: for men usually spoke and acted as the laws of their country prescribed, whatever they thought: till the Jews, in their captivities and dispersions, refusing to worship any other God, than the one invisible Maker of heaven and earth, provoked, by so doing, Pagan bigotry; and instead of being the first persecutors, were amongst the first martyrs; indeed to true piety were the very first, Socrates having always conformed to the religion of Athens, and being unjustly condemned as rejecting it. Yet as the Jews were not commanded to propagate their faith, but only to profess it, which however did propagate it in some measure; the number of their sufferers for conscience sake, except in the

time of the Maccabees, was very small, when compared with those of the primitive Christians.

For the Apostles of our blessed Lord, their companions and successors, being intrusted by him with a commission the most beneficial to mankind that ever was; that of notifying to the Jews, that their promised Messiah was come; of converting the Gentiles from idolatry, and teaching all men the genuine love of God and their neighbour, as the way to eternal happiness; became, for undertaking this good work, (though they proceeded in it most respectfully to magistrates, and inoffensively to all men) objects of public rage, instead of gratitude. Nor were they only, but their followers of both sexes, pursued with warmer zeal, and destroyed by more exquisite torments, than the vilest malefactors: nor was the continuance of these barbarities, excepting some intervals, much less than three hundred years. Yet none of them were retaliated, when, in spite of them all, our faith, by its own reasonableness, and the unwearied patience of its adherents, had prevailed, and was become the reigning one: not even the bitterest persecutors were punished for all the murders, which they had committed. Nor did any erroneous Christian suffer death from a Christian magistrate for his errors, for a long while afterwards: nor was any law made for that end, I believe, in one thousand years from our Saviour's coming. In process of time indeed the rulers of the church of Rome, having already introduced other corruptions into our holy profession, supported them by introducing this also. But when they were become persecutors, much truer and more orthodox Christians became once more willing martyrs. Amongst these our first reformers were emi-

nent: since whose days, liberty of conscience and the religious rights of mankind have been asserted on more solid grounds, in a fuller extent, and with greater consistence, than ever was done before. Nor I hope will the members of our communion ever forget to exercise, either due caution against the open and secret attempts of those blood-thirsty and faith-breaking tyrants, or due moderation towards all, who peaceably dissent from us.

And they, who accuse Christianity of the cruelties, committed by the professors of it, should consider, how much its genuine professors abominate even the smallest of them, and every tendency to them. But indeed these our adversaries, who would seem to abhor a persecuting spirit beyond all men, and complain of our religion, as encouraging it, have singular need to examine, of what spirit they are themselves: and whether they do not by false imputations, and *cruel mockings**, the only weapons which they have at command, persecute most unrighteously, (without any pretence of conscience to oblige them to it) both Christian faith, and natural piety, without sparing in several instances even moral virtue. A proper sense of their own unreasonable vehemencies would incline them to excuse, as far as possible, those of other men, and restrain them from going on to bring charges against the innocent and guilty, promiscuously. But though we were all as bad in this respect, as they imagine the worst of us to be, it would by no means affect the truth of the Scripture doctrine, which is far from encouraging force in matters of faith. The patriarchal religion is free from all shadow of blame in that respect: the Jewish hath been sufficiently vindicated: and the Christian fully clears itself.

* Heb. xi. 36.

Our blessed Lord, reproved his Disciples, when they would have called down fire from Heaven on the Samaritans; who, besides being both heretics and schismatics, had used him personally ill: and told them, *that the Son of Man was not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them**. And though in a parable he uses the words, *compel them to come in*†; both the whole of the context, and the whole of his instructions, particularly those which he gave to his Apostles when he first sent them forth, irrefragably prove, that the only compulsion intended was that of cogent reasons and pressing exhortations. Accordingly St. Paul plainly asserts, that *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*‡, but that we are to *instruct in meekness those that oppose themselves*§. We are not then authorized to raise persecution, but on the contrary commanded patiently to suffer it. And therefore I now proceed,

II. To shew the excellency of this duty: and particularly, as practised by the first Christians.

I have already observed, that as most of the heathens thought all religions might be true, they were in little danger of suffering for any: and amongst such, as thought their established faith and worship false and even mischievous, few or none had the patriotism to declare against it, or the security to refuse complying with it. The Jews, who, so long as they observed their law, were assured of national prosperity, had small need of precepts to undergo persecution for it willingly: which however they did undergo with admirable fortitude, when the sins of the people in general had brought the pious part, along with themselves, into distress. And it is a moving de-

* Luke ix. 54, 55, 56.
† Luke xiv. 23.
‡ 2 Cor. x. 4.
§ 2 Tim. ii. 25.

scription, which the Epistle to the Hebrews gives of their sufferings. *They had trials of mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were slain with the sword: they went about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented: of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in desarts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth**.

Their afflictions however were only occasional consequences of the idolatry of their countrymen. But Christianity set out from the first, with our Saviour's predictions to his Disciples, that *they should be hated of all nations, delivered up, and killed, for his name's sake*†; with their predictions to their converts, that *all, who would live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution*‡; with immediate and dreadful examples of these truths; with the express command, *Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*§. And faithful accordingly they were, to such a degree, as nothing but consciousness of truth, and divine assistance, could possibly make them.

The Apostles gave no proofs of courage in the first part of their history. They all deserted our Saviour, as soon as ever he was apprehended: one of them was terrified, without any particularly great occasion, into denying him: and even after his resurrection, nay probably his ascension too, they kept their assemblies very private, *for fear of the Jews*‖. What was it then, that changed them into such different persons, within the space of a few days? What could it be else, than the completion, recorded in the acts of our Saviour's promise, *Ye shall receive power,*

* Heb. ix. 36, 37, 38. † Matth. xxiv. 9. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 12.
§ Rev. ii. 10. ‖ John xx. 19. Acts i. 13, 14.

*after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and all Judea, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth**. With what surprising boldness, immediately upon this, doth the late apostate, St. Peter, *standing up with the Eleven, lift up his voice, and say, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words*†: *let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, Lord and Christ*‡. This was not a passionate and inconsiderate courage. For what had there happened, that could raise it in them all? And what could possibly be milder and more rational, than their uniform temper and behaviour: which, their answer to the threatenings of the rulers, both so resolutely and so decently expresses? *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you, more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things, which we have seen and heard*§.

As they bore testimony, not merely to doctrines and opinions, but to plain and repeated, though miraculous facts, of which their senses were perfect judges, they could not mistake. And what could they hope for by attempting to deceive? They must each of them know themselves to be every way unqualified for conducting a fraud of this nature. They had seen just before, that they could not trust, either to the bravery, or the fidelity, one of another. Or if they could, a great part of what they said might easily be confuted notwithstanding, if it was not true. For aught appears, they might have returned to their former occupations with great safety.

* Acts i. 8. † Acts ii. 14.
‡ Ver. 36. § Acts iv. 18, 19, 20.

But if they went on in this new way: they knew the magistrates were vehement against them; they saw the people, at best, would do nothing to support them; and the fate of their master was full before their eyes. In these circumstances, worldly advantage could not be their motive. And fondness of acquiring glory amongst their followers was not likely to overbalance the fear of punishment, in men of their education; especially in a number of them: besides that, humanly speaking, they could expect neither glory nor followers. And in fact they were held in the lowest contempt by most men, and honoured but by few. Or should we suppose, that contrary to all probability, and to the express notices given them, they looked for better treatment in carrying on their undertaking, than they found: yet when they perceived their disappointment, would no one of them have been so honest, as to own his error, and detect his accomplices; or at least so wise as to withdraw himself out of harm's way? Would they all have gone on, year after year, supporting persecution and death, one after another: neither taking warning nor complaining, but rejoicing and triumphing? Hear only, what a description St. Paul gives of their and his own condition. *God hath set forth us the Apostle's last, as it were appointed to death: we are made a spectacle unto the world:—even unto this present hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands;—we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day**. Could they have chosen to bear this from any other principle, than that, which he elsewhere mentions? *We*

* 1 Cor. iv. 9. 11, 12, 13.

*are troubled on every side, yet not distressed: perplexed, but not in despair: persecuted, but not forsaken: cast down, but not destroyed. We are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh: —Knowing that he, which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus:—for which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day**. Nor were they affected in this heroic manner, only while death might possibly be at a distance from them; but the nearer it approached, the more they felt of the same spirit. *I am now,* saith St. Paul, *ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day* †. Can there be words in language more expressive of conscious integrity, and composed fortitude?

But this was far from the whole excellence of that frame of mind, with which they met sufferings. Could they have delighted themselves with the thought of vengeance falling on their adversaries, either from men or from God, in the present life or in the next, it might possibly have given some poor consolation and support to corrupt nature under torments and death. But their master's rule was, ***Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you*** ‡. Had he meant only to harden them into a bold unfeeling obstinacy, he would never have required of them such tenderness of kind affection towards adversaries: a temper

* 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9. 11. 14. 16. † 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. ‡ Matth v. 44.

so very inconsistent with all the common excitements to courage in resisting them. And had they found themselves unable to attain such exalted virtue, to which none almost before them had even made pretensions, they would have concealed or dropt his precept, or explained it away. But on the contrary, they professed it to its full extent. *Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity,* that is, universal love to all men, *it profiteth me nothing* *. And they practised it, as they professed it. *Being reviled, we bless: being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat* †. They expressed all the kindness, they made all the excuses, for their persecutors, which they possibly could. Thus the same St. Paul: *I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart, for my brethren who are Israelites* ‡. *My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge* §. Nor was this their manner of speaking, only when at ease, or when they could hope to obtain favour by it: but, as the case of St. Stephen shews, their sentiments were the same, under the certainty, under the actual pains, of death itself, even when suddenly and tumultuously inflicted on them. For he prayed at once to the Lord Jesus, with his last breath, to receive his spirit, and to forgive them that stoned him.

Such was the blessed temper of the first witnesses to the Christian faith: and their successors inherited a noble degree of it. They could not indeed give an equally strong testimony to the original facts, on which it was built; but they attested many subsequent ones of great importance. And not only their

* 1 Cor. xiii. 3. † 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.
‡ Rom. ix. 2, 3, 4. § Rom. x. 1, 2.

embracing it, as they did, contrary to all the prejudices of common opinion, and all the dictates of every wrong inclination, makes it necessary to presume, that they must have had powerful evidence for it: but their perseverance in professing it, amidst every thing terrible in life or death, fully proves them to have been thoroughly sincere, and singularly magnanimous. Indeed it proves further, that more than ordinary strength was vouchsafed to them from above. For though natural constancy and bravery have in some instances performed wonders, yet the performers have been few in proportion: whereas the primitive Christians in general of both sexes, all ages, all ranks, underwent the most grievous inflictions with the calmest patience. Observe too: they could have little hope of distinguishing themselves in the opinion of their fellow-Christians by suffering. For, though a few of the principal martyrs were highly honoured, yet the rest were too numerous, either to be remembered after their death, or have notice taken of them at the time of it. Nor did their intrepidity arise from being trained up to the resolution of martyrdom. For this would have often failed: and besides, new converts, just made, as boldly suffered death, as any others; nay, sometimes persecutors themselves became converts on the spot, and died with those whom they had brought to execution. Still it was not merely a sudden vehemence, which they catched one of another. For not only particular persons had often the leisure of long imprisonments to cool in: but the whole Church had many and considerable intervals of peace. Yet, whenever persecution began again, it found the generality of Christians in the same spirit, which they shewed before: respectful in the highest degree to

civil authority; but unmoveable to an equal degree from their duty to God: where they were ever so few, not to be forced or persuaded into the slightest acts of idolatry; where they were ever so many, not to be provoked into a single attempt of rebellion; or into making or joining any party or faction for their own security; though the frequent changes in the state gave them inviting opportunities for it. In the comfortless exercise (for so it must appear to common spectators,) of this cool passive courage, infinitely more difficult than the active and enterprising sort, they patiently persevered for three hundred years. The wonderfulness of the behaviour moved men to inquire into the grounds of it: they found them good; they came over; and the empire was become in effect Christian, before the emperors ceased to persecute.

The unjustifiable veneration addressed by the church of Rome to saints and martyrs hath deterred almost all the reformed Churches, except our own, from paying them even due honours. And now amongst ourselves, prejudice against religion in some, and indifference to it in others, hath made these excellent persons be regarded commonly, either with a malignant or a negligent eye. But if they, who have acted or suffered gallantly, for the liberties or other interests of a single nation, have been reverenced by distant ages, and all their faults hid under that one virtue; how much higher esteem do such patriots deserve, as have borne testimony with their blood against the tyranny of idolatry and immoral superstition; who have lived in misery and died in torment, to assert the faith of one wise and good Maker and Ruler of all, of pardon for sin, and assistance in virtue, derived to us by methods of in-

finite, though mysterious goodness; who have given to mankind, both by their doctrine and example, the justest rules of worthy and prudent conduct in this life; and spread through the world an assurance, founded on God's express promise, (which alone could support it,) of endless felicity in a life to come! Should our accounts of them be ever so imperfect, or meanly written: should any of them appear no otherwise great, than as they were admirably good men: should their zeal have sometimes transported them beyond discretion; (though such transports were few, and always condemned by the body of Christians:) or should other and even considerable frailties be found mixed with the excellencies of some of them: yet, so long as we know, that they were and did what hath now been mentioned; we have surely cause to hold them for ever in most honourable estimation, and respect the Gospel of Christ much the more highly on account of such witnesses to its truth and efficacy.

But admiring them is nothing, unless we also imitate them, in their solicitude for its advancement, in their steady adherence to God and their duty, in their contempt of worldly advantages and pleasures, losses and punishments; in their meekness under injuries, in their resignation under pains and afflictions, in their love to their fellow-Christians and fellow-creatures, in their lively faith of a future recompence We are not called, as they were, to *take joyfully the spoiling of our goods* *, *to suffer trouble even unto bonds, as evil doers* †, to undergo shame and torture, and *to die for the name of the Lord Jesus* ‡. No *temptation hath taken us, but such as is common to man* §.

* Heb. x. 34. † 2 Tim. ii. 9.
‡ Acts, xxi. 13. § 1 Cor. x. 13.

Ordinarily speaking, we have nothing to perform, but what conduces on the whole to every one's present benefit: and we have nothing to bear on account of our religion, but perhaps a little trifling ridicule from the vain and the vicious. Even such persecution indeed is very wicked in them; but needs not in the least be formidable to us. And if for that alone, we are ashamed to *confess* our Saviour *before men*, well may we expect that he should *deny us before his Father which is in Heaven* *.

Let us therefore *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering* †: never do any thing inconsistent with it for temporal prospects or fears: never pay court to the irreligious, by mean compliances with their talk or behaviour, in hopes of better quarter from them; for it will be much harder to stop afterwards, than to maintain our present ground: yet never be moved either to passion against them, or uncharitableness towards them; but freely own their good qualities, while we carefully preserve an abhorrence of their bad ones; pity their unhappiness, while we condemn their sins; and earnestly pray, that they may repent and be forgiven. For thus shall we *adorn the doctrines of God our Saviour in all things* ‡; and be *followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises* §.

* Matth. x. 32, 33.
† Heb. x. 23.
‡ Tit. ii. 10.
§ Heb. vi. 12.

SERMON XIX.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God: and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

MAN is by nature ignorant and thoughtless: and therefore wants information and admonition. He is also prone to evil, and averse from good: and therefore wants restraint from the former, and incitement to the latter. Without the assistance, which we receive one from another in these respects, we should be wicked and wretched beyond imagination. But though we should be most defective in a state of solitude, yet we are very deplorably so, even when joined to the best advantage in society. Many points of the utmost moment, relating both to our present and future condition, we either cannot discover at all, or not with certainty: many, which we might, not even the wiser, much less the greater part, have in fact known: and those, which hardly any could fail to perceive, all have, more or less, failed to regard. Most of these things are visibly men's own fault: and the rest are no imputation upon God. For unquestionably he may with justice place any of his creatures in as low a state, both of understanding and moral ability, as he pleases: provided he requires from them, as he certainly will, only in proportion to what he hath given

And even his infinite goodness cannot oblige him to bestow on them greater favours, than his infinite wisdom sees to be proper: which it is no wonder should act upon reasons, to us unsearchable. But the less we have ground to expect, the more thankfully we ought to receive whatever notices, encouragements, or warnings, he may vouchsafe more immediately from himself.

Now we have in our hands a book, which we call the Bible: containing accounts of various communications made to mankind by their Creator from the beginning: but principally through the hands of Moses and the prophets; of Jesus Christ and his Disciples: together with great numbers of most important consequences from thence resulting. Both parts of this book are credibly affirmed to be written by persons, who must in the main have known the truth or falshood of what they say: none of whom have given grounds to suspect their veracity; but many, the strongest possible grounds to rely on it. They support the authority of the doctrines and precepts delivered there by express prophecies and public miracles, recounted there also: which prophecies have, most of them, undeniably been since fulfilled, nor do any appear to have failed; and which miracles, though they could never have been acknowledged if they had not been real, were, so far as we can learn, denied by no one, either at the time when they were said to be done, or long after. On the contrary, the Old Testament hath always been admitted, as true and genuine, by the whole Jewish nation: and the Pentateuch in particular, used as the law of their country; though it appoints more things than one to be done, so utterly and visibly contrary to human policy, that they must proceed from Him, whose extraordinary providence alone could make them practicable with safety;

and others, too contrary to human inclinations, for men to have chosen, without being sure that God required them. And as to the writers of the New Testament, it is still more certain, that their works were published near the time and in the places, where they affirm the events, which they relate, came to pass: that they agree surprisingly well, though in general they were unlearned persons, and plainly had not concerted their story together: that they led pious and virtuous lives: that they were willing to suffer death for the sake of their testimony. And accordingly the whole Christian church from its rise embraced their narrations with a faith, which neither artifice nor persecution were able to overturn, or keep it from prevailing through the world, though contrary to the favourite notions and vicious desires of all mankind: which alone is a proof, that the facts related in them, even the most miraculous, were previously known to be true; and the doctrines the same, which had been already taught by the Apostles: else Jews, heathens and Christians must have exclaimed against the authors, as publishers of falshoods, and they could never have obtained credit. Some few of their books indeed, (but such as taught no one article that is not in the others, nor denied any one that is) were questioned in some congregations for a good while, perhaps with more caution than needed: but were then put on a level with the rest. Neither Testament is pretended to be disproved, but both are confirmed, as far as could be expected, by such heathen records as are extant: and if either had been confuted formerly by any, that are now lost, it must have sunk; which hath not been the case. Each of them furnishes powerful internal evidence in favour of itself: each adds mani-

fold strength to the other: and no writings whatever stand on the credit of such numerous and decisive attestations.

Were we therefore to consider them merely as compositions of excellent men, well informed, and faithfully informing us, in the best manner they could, of what it most concerns us to know, we must allow them to be a most valuable blessing; a treasure unspeakably superior to all the other remains of antiquity. But this is much too low an esteem of them: they were written moreover under the special direction of Heaven, and that for an end no less important, than a full supply of our spiritual wants. These two points the apostle asserts plainly in the text: and I shall endeavour to confirm and improve his assertions, by shewing, in some discourses upon it,

I. That all Scripture is of divine authority.

II. That it completely answers every purpose of religion.

III. That we ought to read and study it diligently.

IV. How we may do this to the best effect.

I. That *all Scripture is* of divine authority, or, in St. Paul's language, *given by inspiration of God:* a position extremely requisite to be understood in its true sense, and established on its proper foundation. For some have held it to signify, that every sentence and word was dictated from above: and consequently have made room, without intending it, for as many plausible objections, as there are appearances of any thing, which in respect of clearness, elegance, order, strength, exceeds not human power, or falls beneath absolute perfection. Others, especially of late years, partly to guard against this danger, and partly to excuse notions of their own, which are contrary to

Scripture, have imagined, that being inspired meant little more (at least in relation to the historical and doctrinal books) than being indued with a large measure of general pious intention: so that, continuing to call themselves Christians, and professing a high respect for the sacred writers as good men, they have thought themselves justified in doubting, or even disbelieving, almost as much as they please, of what the Scriptures teach.

To state therefore and defend the sense of the text, I shall begin with explaining the terms. The word, here translated *Scripture*, denotes frequently in other authors any writing whatever. Whence some ancient versions render the original thus: *every writing, given by inspiration of God, is profitable*, and so forth: leaving it undetermined, which are so given. But always, in the Gospels and Epistles, it denotes that collection of writings, which the Church acknowledged for its rule of life and manners. When our Apostle sent this epistle to Timothy, several parts of the New Testament were not published, and scarce any had spread very far: so that he must by *Scripture* mean chiefly if not solely, the Old Testament. But the books of the New, from their first appearance, obtained the same title every where. St. Peter gives it by the plainest implication to what St. Paul wrote *: and doubtless what he, and the rest of the twelve, wrote, equally deserved it. Inspiration is any particular influence of God on the mind: whence we pray in the communion service, that he would *cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit*. But, in the case before us, it must signify such influence, as will be effectual for the purpose of writing such books. And of this there may be various degrees re-

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

quisite, and therefore granted, according to the variety of circumstances. Moving a person inwardly to undertake the work is one degree. Superintending him during the execution of it, so as to preserve him from any considerable mistake or omission, is another. Preserving him from all, even the least, is a higher still. Enabling him to express himself in a manner loftier, clearer, more convincing or more affecting, than he could have done otherwise, is yet a further step. Suggesting to him also the matter, which he shall deliver, goes beyond the former, especially if he was unacquainted with it till then. And putting into his mouth the very words he shall use, is the completest guidance, that can be.

Now we say not, that God hath done all these things in every part of Scripture: but so many in each as were needful. That he directed Moses to write his laws *, and Isaiah †, and Ezekiel ‡, and Habakkuk §, part at least of their prophecies, and Jeremiah the whole of his ||, and St. John the book of Revelation ¶, they themselves positively assure us: and by parity of reason we may presume it concerning the rest: nor can we doubt, but that, writing in obedience to his command, they wrote so, as he approved. On some occasions perhaps they wanted, and therefore had, no extraordinary assistance. Without this, the historians amongst them might relate several facts from their own personal knowledge, others from authentic records: and Moses might receive his accounts of the earliest ages from undoubted tradition. For tradition was much longer credible, when there were but few things to commit to memory,

* Exod. xxxiv. 27. Comp. xxiv. 4. Deut. xxxi. 9. 22.
† Is. viii. 1. xxx. 8. ‡ Ezek. xliii. 11. § Hab. ii. 2.
|| Jer. xxx. 2. xxxvi. 2. 28. ¶ Rev. i. 11. 19.

and there was no other way of preserving them, and two or three generations lasted many centuries. The writers of the Psalms might often chuse their own subjects, and treat them suitably to their own genius. The wise king and other compilers of the Proverbs, might perpetuate their own maxims. The authors of the Epistles may well be supposed to have given the many small directions, which we find in them, solely from the dictates of their own prudence. The authors of all the books might be trusted very commonly to use their own stile and method, (in which accordingly there is much diversity) nay, even their own illustrations, arguments and reasonings, on the points before them. And yet, amidst all this, the watchful eye of God might sufficiently provide against their misleading into error and sin, or omitting to instruct in any thing essential, those, whom they were appointed *to make wise unto salvation* *.

That he hath superintended them thus far, is evident from the necessity of his doing it. The patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian revelations, which are contained, with their principal evidences, in these books, could not be known with certainty otherwise than by means of them, after some time, though they might at first by word of mouth. And therefore to prevent his gracious intention towards every succeeding generation from being frustrated, undoubtedly God would take care, that the Scripture should teach us infallibly what he required us to believe and do: which was impossible, if his truths and the imaginations of his creatures were blended in them promiscuously: or indeed, if they were only left to express themselves as they could, properly or improperly, concerning abstruse and difficult matters, (as there

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

are many such in the sacred writings,) where a small error in their phrase might occasion a great one in our belief or conduct. For on this supposition, how should we distinguish with safety in matters of such moment: and where shall they, who reject any one article find a sure place to stop at? Fatal experience hath proved continually, that they can find none. And consequently our wise and good Maker would effectually preserve writings of such infinite importance, not only from gross errors, but from the very smallest in faith or practice, and, one should think, in arguings and facts also: the former being often affected by the latter,

But this is not all: he must have interposed much farther. We find passages throughout, so sublime, so pathetic, full of such energy and force upon the heart and conscience; yet without the least appearance of labour and study for that purpose: indeed the design of the whole is so noble, so well suited to the sad condition of human kind; the morals have in them such purity and dignity; the doctrines are many of them so much above reason, yet all of them so reconcileable with it; the expression is so majestic, yet familiarised with such easy simplicity; that the more we read and study these books with pious dispositions and judicious attention, the more we shall see and feel of the hand of God in them; and without fixing distinctly on this or that text, be fully satisfied in the gross, that no mere men, and yet less unlearned men, as several of the writers were, could ever approach to such perfection, (far superior to that of the most admired heathens,) without being raised vastly above themselves by supernatural aid. But then if we consider also the accurate agreement and correspondence of the several parts, though of very dif-

ferent natures, written at very different times, under very different dispensations of religion, and scenes of worldly affairs; that, numerous and various as they are, they unite nevertheless into one consistent and connected scheme, and the more evidently so, the stricter inquiry is made into it; this will greatly strengthen the proof of divine suggestions, as well as restraints. For such harmony must proceed from one original plan, formed in the mind of God, portions of which only were communicated to the several publishers of it; yet each of them was influenced from above to so punctual an execution of his respective trust, that what he said, perfectly tallied with what he was ignorant of, till at length the whole was completed by our blessed Redeemer; *in whom all the building, fitly framed together, grew up into a holy temple in the Lord* *.

But after this general view, let us enter into some particulars. The Mosaic law, if at all from God, was dictated by God: for it affirms itself to be so. The contents of the prophetic books are, predictions of future events, and commissions to deliver such and such instructions to the people. These also, if true, (as the completions of the former demonstrate that they were,) must have been suggested. One of the Prophets declares, that *he heard, but understood not* †. Others of them St. Peter describes, as *diligently searching* into the times and circumstances, to which their messages related ‡. And probably they all apprehended the meaning of a great part of them but imperfectly. Now we may be certain, that God would effectually incline them to deliver these, by using the very words, which they received. And in the rest they would of course endeavour it, and have their memories undoubtedly strengthened, as far as

* Eph. ii. 21. † Dan. xii. 8. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 11.

needed, to perform it. Some revelations indeed were made to them, not by words, but by visible appearances, or impressions on their imagination. Here again we cannot question, but they were enabled to relate them in proper terms. Farther yet: many of the Psalms are plainly prophetical, and even the historical books contain prophecies: these also must have been suggested from above. The very histories are, some of them, such as man could not know, some such, as in all likelihood the writers did not know, of themselves, or from other men: therefore God must have communicated them too. And from the beginning to the end of Scripture are such numbers of things of such exalted excellency, that we may well say of the writer, concerning each of them, as our Saviour doth to St. Peter: *Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven* *.

However, as we Christians are most immediately concerned with the New Testament, and proving its divine authority singly will prove that of the Old, which is every where asserted in it, I shall dwell upon this point more largely.

The Evangelists give us not only a circumstantial account of our Saviour's journies, miracles, sufferings, resurrection, but frequent narrations of his discourses likewise: some of them very long, all of them together making up near half the Gospels; and St. John, who wrote the last, hath the most of them. We, who have heard and read them frequently, were we now to read one of the larger again, should scarce be able to repeat it, without considerable omissions, nay without variations altering the sense. The Disciples at the time were far from comprehending them all: it is no where affirmed, that they wrote any of them down,

* Matt. xvi. 17.

till several years after: probably some of the Gospels were not published within twenty or thirty years or more. Yet a small failure in representing the doctrine of their Master, his vindications of himself, his predictions of future events, nay, any thing of moment, that he did or that befel him, (especially considering how many things were foretold concerning him) might have been extremely detrimental to Christianity. And therefore assuredly they would never have dared to specify such a variety of particulars, both said and done; or if they had, could never have agreed so well in them, without supernatural assistance. But they well knew they should have it.

Our Saviour, before his death, promised them, that the *Holy Ghost should teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said to them* *, and *guide them into all truth* †. He assured them, *it was expedient for them, that he should go away*, because, till then, he could not, consistently with the purposes of infinite wisdom, send the Spirit to them ‡: whence it must follow, that by the aid of the Spirit, they were as secure from error, as if they had (what after they were dispersed to preach the Gospel was impossible) Christ bodily present with them, to ask concerning the things which they had heard or seen. He told them farther, that when they should *be brought before governors and kings to bear testimony* for him, *it should be given them, in that same hour, what they should speak: for* saith he, *it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father, which speaketh in you* §. To pretend that this promise means only courage and presence of mind, is contrary to all reason, and all

* John xiv. 26. † John xvi. 13. ‡ John xvi. 7.
§ Matth. x. 18, 19, 20. Comp. Luke xii. 11, 12.

use of Scripture language. And if it means, as it evidently doth, divine superintendence; they certainly wanted, and therefore would have, at least as much of it, when they wrote books, which God foresaw (whether they did or no) must be the only standing rule of Christian faith for ever, as when they spoke occasionally before this or that heathen magistrate.

The assurances, which he vouchsafed to them, we read, were fully made good. After his resurrection he said to them, *As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you: then he breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost* *. After his ascension, they were filled with his gifts yet more abundantly, *spake with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance* †; discerned the secrets of men's hearts, foretold things to come, performed the very greatest of miracles, had frequent revelations from above, seem to have done nothing of moment without an especial guidance. Surely then, they, who were thus under God's direction, did not write the New Testament without it; they who confirmed in this manner what they taught, were not capable of leaving unmentioned any fundamental truth, and yet less of teaching any error.

Now two of these, Matthew and John, Apostles and companions of our Lord, are also Evangelists. The latter was peculiarly beloved of our Saviour while on earth, and afterwards saw in vision and heard from his mouth, and that of an angel, all that is contained in the book of Revelation: whence we not only infer its infallible authority, but are strongly confirmed in our belief, that the spirit of Jesus was present with him in writing his Gospel and Epistles also. The two other Evangelists indeed, Mark and Luke, were

* John xx. 21, 22. † Acts ii. 4.

not Apostles: but their works were approved by St Peter and St Paul, who were: and all the four Gospels have ever been held in equal esteem. The book of Acts is a sequel of the third, which the writer would not fail to lay before the same Apostle, who had inspected his Gospel: especially as it principally relates to him, and ends at the same time when they were together at Rome, and at full leisure to revise it jointly.

It is true, St. Paul himself was not one of the twelve. But *he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of them* *; being miraculously called to *see that just one, to hear the voice of his mouth* †, and to *receive* his Gospel, *not of man, but by the* immediate *revelation of Jesus Christ* ‡. Certainly then he was not suffered either to misrepresent or suppress any part of it, whether speaking or writing, or to deliver any thing as comprehended in it, which was not. But let us hear what he saith of his own preaching. *We speak the things given unto us of God, not in the words, which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth* §. *When ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God* ‖. Let us hear what he saith of his own Epistles. *If any man think himself a prophet or spiritual,* that is, indued with supernatural gifts, *let him acknowledge, that the things, which I write unto you, are the commandments of the Lord* ¶. *He therefore, that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit* **. Yet we may be confident, *that he did not boast of himself beyond his measure* ††, or *dare to*

* 2 Cor. xi. 5. † Acts xxii. 14. ‡ Gal. i. 12.
§ 1 Cor. ii. 12, 13. ‖ 1 Thess. ii. 13. ¶ 1 Cor. xiv. 37.
** 1 Thess. iv. 8. †† 2 Cor. x. 13.

*speak of any thing, which Christ had not wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, by mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God**. And observe, he doth not, after all this, any where exalt himself above the other Apostles: but he places all the Apostles above the Prophets†: which likewise in effect St. Peter doth, when having first exhorted Christians *to be mindful of the words, which were spoken before by the holy Prophets*, he adds, in yet stronger terms, and *of the commandment of us, the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour*‡. St. John also, in his first Epistle, uses language, in general, of the same high import. *He that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error*§. Could such eminent saints, could any religious and humble, or commonly honest, men, provoke God, and attempt to deceive their fellow-creatures, by making such claims as these, without foundation? Would not he instantly have withdrawn his gifts from them? Would not their enviers and rivals, for such there were, have exposed them? Would not all Christians by common consent have rejected them? Certainly they would: yet certainly they did just the contrary.

The only two writers of the New Testament, whom I have not yet named particularly, are St. James and St. Jude: of whom it may be very sufficient to observe, that they were both Apostles, and near kinsmen of our Lord, and therefore might well expect the same regard with the rest; which, by the whole tenor of their Epistles, they appear to do, though

* Rom. xv. 18, 19.
† 1 Cor. xii. 28.
‡ 2 Pet. iii. 2.
§ 1 John iv. 6.

without demanding it so expressly, for which they had probably no occasion.

Still we acknowledge that some Christians at Antioch disputed one part of what Paul and Barnabas taught there: and afterwards, when the Apostles held a council at Jerusalem upon it, certain Pharisees, who were believers, debated the same point*. But no wonder, if new converts, full of old prejudices, were backward to part with them, where the honour of the law seemed to be impaired by it, considering how obstinately refractory their forefathers had been to known Prophets, and to Moses himself. However, being with great condescension heard, then instructed by St. James and St. Peter, they submitted. Yet, we own farther, in the decree made on this occasion, where the Apostles say, *It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us*, they join the elders and brethren with them. But so doth St. Paul join one or other with him in no less than eight of his Epistles†: and in both cases the meaning, plainly is, not to allow them equal authority, but merely to express their concurrence.

Indeed the Apostles themselves were not led into all truth at once: but this is very consistent with being secured from any error. They were also liable to act imprudently: as St. Peter did, when he separated himself from the Gentiles at Antioch, fearing to offend the believing Jews, for which St. Paul blamed him‡; and as perhaps even Paul too did, when not knowing the High Priest, he reproved him so severely, though deservedly§. But there was not

* Acts xv. 1, &c. † 1 Cor. i. 1. 2 Cor. i. 1. Gal. i. 1, 2. Phil. i. 1. Col. i. 1. 1 Thess. i. 1. 2 Thess. i. 1. Philem. ver. 1. ‡ Gal. ii. 11, &c. § Acts xxiii. 2, &c.

the least falshood asserted by either: and the behaviour of both turned to the advantage of Christianity. Some have objected to the inspiration of the latter, that in one place he only saith, *He thinks he hath the spirit of God**. But this ironical seeming doubt was designed to imply the strongest affirmation, and to put his adversaries to shame. They object also, that in the same chapter he distinguishes the directions, which Christ had given in person, from his own †. And he doth so: but what is this more, than a most amiable expression of humility, and respect to his dear Lord? A few persons have likewise apprehended that when he saith to the Corinthians, *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed*‡, and again to the Thessalonians, *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent,* go to Heaven before, *those which are asleep*§; he meant, that the general resurrection was to be in his days, and therefore erred. But plainly he did not: for in his second Epistle to the latter, written the same year, he cautions them against misunderstanding, (as it seems they some of them had done,) what he said on that head in his first: and mentions things, which were to intervene between his own days and the resurrection, and must take up time‖. In other Epistles too, he speaks of his own dying, first as likely¶, then as certain to happen soon**. And therefore by *we*, in the places objected, he meant only in general, we, or such of us, Christians: not designing to intimate, that he himself should be one of the number. In this sense he frequently uses

* 1 Cor. vii. 40. † 1 Cor. vii. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 51.
§ 1 Thess. iv. 15. ‖ 2 Thess. ii. 1, &c. ¶ Phil. i. 20.
** 2 Tim. iv. 6.

both, *We*, and even, *I*, elsewhere, as many approved authors have done in different nations and ages.

Objections have been raised against various passages of holy writ, besides the above-mentioned. Some have been thought hard to reconcile with the moral attributes of God: some with each other. To examine them here particularly would be much too long. General observations, capable, I hope, of removing or obviating the principal difficulties, especially of the former sort, shall, God willing, be made in the sequel of these discourses. But without doing that, it might be sufficient to say, that reasonable answers have been already given to them: that many of them, which once appeared to be of the greatest importance, have been fully shewn to be of none: from whence alone we may justly presume, that whatever is wanting to clear up the rest will be supplied in time by the blessing of God on the continued labours of pious and learned men: and that in the mean while, instead of thinking ill of the Scriptures, we ought to think humbly of ourselves, and be persuaded, that in these points we do not understand them*.

Such, as were most eminent for piety and knowledge, and have enjoyed the greatest advantages for judging of Scripture, have always esteemed it of divine original. The Christians of the first and second centuries, who must have known personally, whether the books of the New Testament were authentic, who had been companions of the Apostles and their immediate successors, who must have been taught by them, what honour both Testaments deserved, and would have been restrained by them from paying them too much, paid them the very highest. All,

* This last is Justin Martyr's Rule, Dial. with Trypho, §. 65.

who came after, exalted them above the most valuable compositions of the most early fathers, by the strongest expressions of peculiar regard: and this regard was universal. None but the absurdest and vilest of heretics refused, and that on the poorest pretences, to be tried by their authority. All others, whatever else they differed in, agreed in acknowledging the infallibility of the Bible, to which they were forced to attempt reconciling their tenets, as well as they could. In later days, we confess, Papists have spoken slightly of it, and libertines much worse: both however for bad reasons; because it condemns the religious notions and practices of the former, and the irreligious ones of the latter. But all unprejudiced and serious men, in proportion to their natural abilities, acquired knowledge, and attention to study it, have held it to this day in reverence: and in proportion as that reverence hath influenced their hearts and lives, have been examples and blessings to all around them.

Let us therefore walk in their steps, and be heartily thankful; first, that God hath not left us (undeserving wretches as we are) to our own conjectures and imaginations concerning what we are to believe and to do, to hope and to fear, but made gracious discoveries of himself, his will and purposes, to mankind; then, that he hath not left these discoveries to come down to us, and our posterity, through the uncertain conveyance of oral tradition, which quickly fails, or of casual writers, who might err in some points necessary, and pass by others unmentioned, but hath excited fit persons to record his truths; exalted their faculties, and strengthened their memories, where it was needful; suggested to them many things, watched over them in all. Let us receive their communica-

[illegible] with the utmost respect, and read them with the utmost care, as the means of our salvation; and if amidst a great deal, that is highly useful and incomparably excellent, we meet sometimes with things, for which we are unable to account; let us indeed seek for solutions diligently, and be willing to admit any fair, any possible one, rather than a mistake in the sacred writings: but though we should meet with no solution, let us consider that humble faith becomes us much better, than haughty contradiction; modest suspense, than rash positiveness: for that God knows every thing, and we know little; that others perhaps now, and we ourselves after farther inquiry, may see very distinctly what at present we see not at all; and, (which alone may suffice to our satisfaction) that whatever else may be dark or doubtful, or seem exceptionable, there is abundantly enough, clearly and indisputably written, to answer the end of all; that *we may believe, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing we may have life through his name**.

* John xx. 31.

SERMON XX.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God: and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

I. In my preceding discourse I proved to you the divine authority of Scripture; and now go on, as was proposed, to shew

II. Its complete usefulness. This the Apostle hath expressed by saying, it *is profitable for doctrine,* or teaching religious truths; for *reproof,* or confutation of the opposite notions and practices; *for correction,* that is, amendment of those, whom it reproves; *for instruction in righteousness,* that is, leading good persons on to still higher degrees of perfection.

Had the writers of it been left to themselves, yet being worthy men, and well informed of what they wrote, it would have been extremely useful. But as they were superintended by the spirit of God, it must be unspeakably more so: in particular, because we may with absolute security rely on it in all points. Whatever it teaches, we may safely learn; and it teaches the whole of Christianity; the historical facts, the articles of faith, the rules of life, the promises, the threatenings, the exhortations, the examples. From Scripture chiefly, and almost solely, we come to know, that God is infinitely perfect, and made the

world; that man is fallen and redeemed; that he hath eternal happiness or misery set before him; and what the means are of procuring the one, and avoiding the other. For reason could discover but little of these things, and did discover much less: and tradition is unable to convey any thing far down with certainty. In this narrow compass lies the proof, and it is a complete proof, of the benefits that we may receive from holy writ. However it hath graciously condescended to invite us to partake of them, by specifying them more distinctly. I shall only mention a few of those, which are enumerated in one Psalm, the 119th. You will judge from thence of the rest. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? Even by ruling himself after thy word**. *Thy words have I hid within my heart, that I might not sin against thee*†. *Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors*‡. *So shall I have wherewith to answer him, that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word*§. *I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy commandments*‖. *Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage*¶. *The law of thy mouth is dearer unto me, than thousands of gold and silver***. *If my delight had not been in thy law, I should have perished in my trouble*††. *Through thy commandment I get understanding: therefore I hate all evil ways*‡‡. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths*§§. *Thy testimonies have I claimed as mine heritage for ever: and why? they are the very joy of my heart*‖‖. *Great peace have they, which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them*¶¶. These and many other advantages, which the inspired writings

* Ps. cxix. 9. † v. 11. ‡ v. 24. § v. 42.
‖ v. 45. ¶ v. 54. ** v. 72. †† v. 92.
‡‡ v. 104. §§ v. 105. ‖‖ v. 111. ¶¶ v. 165.

ascribe to themselves, are also in reason to be expected from them; the authors had experienced them; all pious men have experienced them since; every one, that will, may at this hour. And therefore I shall enlarge no farther at present on the direct evidence of them; but proceed to answer the objections of those, who are hindered by unjust prepossessions from trying them: who either contest the usefulness of Scripture, in order to overturn its authority; or, which is wonderfully inconsistent, think very lowly of the former, while they acknowledge the latter. For I fear many entertain injurious opinions of the word of God, without daring to own it, even to themselves: which influence them powerfully, though secretly, first to read, then to esteem it, less and less; then to indulge a life unsuitable to it, and perhaps in the last place to reject it entirely. These ensnaring sentiments therefore I shall plainly bring forth into your view without disguise, and confute them; that you may have answers ready to the bad suggestions of other men, or your own minds.

It is said then, that these books are not in our own language, but in translations, which most of us must take upon trust, and which often differ. But have men the least pretence to say, that God shall not instruct them, unless he will convey his instructions to them in all the several tongues of the several countries and ages of the world? Is it not better, that he should give them in any one, than in none? Are we not informed by translations of the most important events, that have passed formerly upon earth? Do not most of the subjects of some large empires to this day learn the will of their sovereign from translations? And what if the translations of some parts of Scripture vary? They agree in the main: and

there can be no gross impositions; because the clergy of one communion will be sure to detect those of others in such attempts: and there are multitudes of learned laity also in lands of freedom; and it is the common interest of all persons not to be deceived.

It is said further, that one should expect a book, written by direction from God for instructing the world in religion, to be a short plain methodical system of belief and practice, unincumbered with any other matters: and the Bible is quite a different thing. But is not the whole system of nature, and the whole conduct of Providence, quite a different thing from what one should have expected? Had we been set to imagine before-hand, what sort of a world God would create, and in what manner he would govern it; we should none of us have pitched on such a creation and government, as we see in fact: but had the scheme of either come into our thoughts, we should probably have fancied there were innumerable and insuperable objections against it. And hence we should learn, that, in the case of revelation also, our fancies are not the measure of God's proceedings; but we are humbly to acquiesce in whatever it appears by proper evidence that he hath done, and not erect ourselves into judges of what he ought to do, or in what manner. Hear his own words: *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts**. The proceedings of divine wisdom will always justify themselves to human inquiry, so far as we are capable of comprehending them. But of necessity many of God's actions must be infinitely more beyond our

* Is. lv. 8, 9.

reach, than the actions of a prudent man are beyond that of a little child. And were the whole plan of Scripture such, as in our first crude notions we should have conceived likely; that very circumstance would have furnished a presumption against it: whereas now we have cause to look on it with that reverence, which the Psalmist expresses: *Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them**. However let us enter a little more particularly into the merits of this plea.

The instruction given us in the Bible, we are told, is not ranged in a just method: but we are to pick out the doctrines and precepts of it often from the midst of histories and prophecies, and put them together as we can. But is not the natural instruction, which God gives us, just of the same sort? Are we not obliged to gather almost the whole of it, from hints and intimations afforded by objects dispersed through the earth: from observations, experiments and reasonings of persons, who have lived in different countries and ages? Yet these are undeniably the means, which he hath appointed to furnish us with one part of our knowledge. And why then may not the Scripture, notwithstanding its apparent want of order, be the means, which he hath appointed to furnish us with another part? It is alledged yet farther, that some very curious and interesting things are entirely omitted, or but briefly hinted there: while some very obvious ones are inculcated, and repeated without end. But curious things are part of them probably unfit to be known perfectly at present: and we may well be content to *see now through a glass darkly*, since hereafter we shall see *face to face*†. Again, such of them, as may properly be

* Ps. cxix. 129. † Prov. ii. 4.

them: but it is somewhat unspeakably nobler, and more extensive, comprehending in the grandest and most magnificent order, along with every essential of that plan, the various dispensations of God to mankind from the forming of this earth to the consummation of all things. It begins with the ground-work of natural religion, the creation of the universe by one holy and good and wise Being: relating distinctly, how all those parts of it, which the heathen worshipped as gods, were in truth the work of God's hands. It proceeds to the origin of the Patriarchal, Jewish and Christian religion, the introduction of sin by the fall of our first parents, of which we experience the wretched effects. It goes on to that amazing punishment of sin, the universal deluge, proved to be as certain, as it was wonderful, by the remaining traces of it throughout the globe. It then recites the second peopling of the world, the relapse of mankind into wickedness, the choice of one family and people to preserve the knowledge of God, and to be as *a light shining in a dark place**, for the benefit of all about them, that would turn their eyes and feet to the way of peace. It lays before us the laws given to this people. It recounts their history, chiefly with regard to their moral and religious behaviour, and dwells on the characters and actions of their most remarkable persons. It supplies us with admirable patterns of genuine piety in the Psalms, most virtuous instructions for the prudent conduct of life in the book of Proverbs, for bearing afflictions in that of Job, for thinking justly of wealth, honour, pleasure, science, in Ecclesiastes. Then in the Prophetical books it gives us, together with the sublimest and worthiest ideas of God, and our duties towards him, the most

* 2 Pet. i. 19.

affecting denunciations of that private and public misery and ruin, which will ever attend sin, whether cloaked by superstition, or displayed in profaneness. And, along with all these things, it unfolds a series of predictions, reaching from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end; and growing, from obscure and general, continually clearer and more determinate; concerning the appearance of a divine person on earth, for the recovery of fallen man, the revival and propagation of true religion throughout the world. The books of the New Testament open to us the execution of this great design. The Gospels record his supernatural birth, his unspotted and exemplary life, his astonishing and gracious miracles, his pure and benevolent doctrine, his *dying for our offences, and rising again for our justification**, his mission of fit persons, endued with the gifts of the holy Spirit to *teach all nations*†, his own ascension into Heaven, and sitting at the right hand of God, till he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. The Acts of the Apostles relate the wonderful success of their preaching, and the original foundation of the catholic church. The Epistles contain their admirable directions to clergy and laity. And the Revelation concludes with foretelling the state of Christianity, primitive, degenerate and reformed, to the last ages. Can there now be a grander, a more comprehensive, a more useful scheme of instruction than this? And doth not the uniformity and variety joined through the whole of it, which, as I have already shewn you, gives evidence of its coming from God, give it also inexpressible beauty? And what then if smaller parts, in so vast a work, appear in some disorder, barren and neglected? Do we not see the same appearance

* Rom. iv. 25. † Matth. xxviii. 19.

of neglect, here and there, through all the works of nature? Yet they are the productions of an all-wise Being. Are we not even struck with it, as majestic and graceful in human performances? and why do we object against it in the Word of God? or by what right do miserable sinners claim, that their Maker, if he sends them declarations of his will, and offers of pardon, shall polish every article to their liking, or subjoin his reasons to each part, when his authority is fully sufficient?

But to obviate more distinctly objections against the profitableness of Scripture, let us examine more particularly the several sorts of books, that compose it. In the earlier historical parts, amongst many most important accounts of ancient time, which we can learn no where else, there are some things imperfectly related. But perhaps the writer knew them but imperfectly: and God was not bound to give him a fuller knowledge. The persons, for whom they were primarily written, understood them sufficiently by means of what is said: and we have no right to understand more of them than we do, indeed not so much. Other passages again seem of small consequence. But they might be of far greater formerly. The genealogies of those, by whom the earth was first peopled, and of considerable families in succeeding ages, even the dry catalogues of names, were, at the time of their being recorded, and long after, partly confirmations of the truth of the history, partly notices of things very interesting. The division of the land of Canaan in Joshua, the list of descents in the beginning of Chronicles, were titles to inheritances. The pedigree of the Levites was necessary to regulate their ministrations: that of the posterity of David, to ascertain the birth of the Messiah. If these, and

other parts of the narration, are not equally agreeable or instructive now, it is easy to pass them over. We have no ground to complain of losing the entertainment or information, which others formerly had from them: for we are abundantly recompensed by being taught many most material things, of which men in those days were ignorant. Yet neither had they any just ground to complain. For God may full as consistently with all his attributes communicate more to one than to another by revelation, as by their natural abilities, and situation in life. The discoveries, which he hath made in Scripture, are progressive; some to one age, greater to the next: and those, which he hath decreed to be made by natural reason, are in this respect of the same kind. Every generation goes off unacquainted with a number of desirable and beneficial things, which the succeeding ones come to know familiarly.

It is farther alledged, that we read in the Bible of very bad actions, done by such as are called very good persons: and men are in danger of being misled by them. But are they not in almost equal danger of being misled by seeing good persons do bad actions almost every day? and if this is no objection against the providence of God, why is the other against his word? Sometimes the connection of the story requires them to be told: and they are seldom, if ever, told without a censure, either expressed or visibly implied, unless the sin be so very notorious, as to need none. At least the precepts of the sacred books are a guard, more than sufficient, against the ill influence of any such histories: which will never do harm, provided we remember but this one plain rule, that nothing contrary to moral virtue is or can be designed to be taught there. On the contrary, they

may serve to various useful purposes. Recording the sins of those, who in the main were eminently pious, is one proof, amongst many, of the impartiality of the writers; and furnishes every reader with strong motives, to circumspection, lest he also fall; to repentance, when he hath fallen: to humility in thinking of himself; to charity in respect of others, who *are overtaken in faults**.

There are likewise, it must be owned, actions not only related in Scripture, but related with the appearance, nay with expressions of approbation, and even said to be commanded by God, that seem at the first view liable to great objections in point of morality. And these are pleaded by some against its authority, by others against its usefulness. But then it must be observed, as to such commands, that God hath a sovereign right to dispose of all his creatures as he pleases; that he may have many reasons for his pleasure, of which we are ignorant; that he may as allowably appoint any person or people to execute it, as the civil magistrate may appoint an executioner of common justice; and that by virtue of such divine appointments, well proved, as those in Scripture are, things may be very lawfully done, which otherwise would be very unlawful; and which therefore were not intended, (nor can easily be mistaken, if we will use our understandings at all) for patterns to be followed where no revelations are given; and in our days none are to be expected. Such, for instance, was the command to Abraham for sacrificing his son; to the Jews for destroying the Canaanites; and to other persons on other occasions. Again, sometimes God is represented by the sacred writers not only as commanding, but as doing himself, things

* Gal. vi. 1.

hard to reconcile with his attributes. But then plainly on several occasions Scripture seems to say, that he doth, what it only means to say, that he permits: because nothing is done without him, and every thing is over-ruled by him to his own good purposes. Time will not permit me to enter into every particular: and therefore I must be content to add in general, that if we bear always in mind, as we ought, the absolute sovereignty of God, and the unsearchable depths of his wisdom; if we allow for circumstances, probably well known when the history of these facts was written, and therefore less needful to be related; or indeed if we only pay due regard to circumstances, which are related, in that very part of Scripture, or some other; we shall either find the means of clearing up the difficulties of this nature which occur, especially by calling in proper help; or however we shall perceive it to be likely, from the discoveries which have been made already, that they will be cleared up hereafter. And reflect, I entreat you, what can we say more than this, concerning several parts of God's creation, which seem to be noxious instead of beneficial, and of his providence, which seem hurtful to the interests of piety and virtue; and yet undoubtedly proceed from him, and are worthy of him? To one use at least, and that of the greatest moment, all such things are adapted, to teach us, from a sense of our own ignorance, deep self-abasement, and implicit veneration for the Lord of all.

Another part of Scripture, pretended by some to be unprofitable and unaccountable, is that, which lays before us the ceremonial precepts of the Jewish law. But no wonder, if when we are not bound to practise any of them, we are not bound to account for all of

them. Some which appear to the illiterate very strange, are proved by the learned to be wise prohibitions of the superstitious and idolatrous rites of their heathen neighbours; and others to be equally wise compliances with, or accommodations to, their innocent customs. And how do we know, at such a distance of time, what a number more there may have been of this kind? Some again seemed designed to convey, under their literal sense, figurative moral instructions; that being a method of teaching anciently admired, and therefore proper to be imitated*. Not a few were plainly contrived to give intimations beforehand concerning the facts and doctrines of the Gospel: very comfortable at the time, though obscure, as God saw fit they should be; very useful now, by proving what was always the divine intention; and particularly useful against the Jews, who thus bear testimony to the very books, that confute them. Besides, it might be, independently on all this, extremely necessary for that carnal people to be employed in a pompous form of piety with many ceremonies: which, however, they had sufficient means of knowing were of no avail, without inward goodness. And the conducting of religion in purity, through such a state of things, is no small evidence that the hand which conducted it was God's. But were the communication of these ritual appointments to us, no otherwise advantageous, it would shew us the happy superiority of our own condition, who *worship God* without them *in spirit and in truth*†. But lastly, the Pentateuch, which contains them,

* Concerning symbolical laws, and the unfitness of requiring to know the reasons of ancient institutions, see Authorities of the Pandects, and Passages of Heathen Writers, in Taylor's Elements of Civil Law, p. 45, 46, 47.

† John iv. 23, 24.

contains over and above many things of unspeakable importance, not only to the proof, but the understanding of Christianity. We must have both conveyed down to us in it, or neither. Which would we chuse? And where is the injury, if in order to give all that is profitable, our Maker gives more than is necessary?

Exceptions have been also taken to the book of Psalms, as having in it frequent imprecations against enemies, which may tempt us to the like. But most of them, if not all, might full as agreeably to the genius of the Hebrew language, have been translated as predictions only*, which in the case of sinners being generally conditional (to take effect unless they repent) were in reality nothing more than warnings, and therefore, kindnesses indeed to the offenders, against whom they were denounced. Or if the holy penmen were sometimes commissioned by inspiration to foretel absolutely, and even to call down the judgments of God on wicked persons, how can this be likely to mislead us, who know such commissions to be ceased, and our standing rule to be, *bless, and curse not* †?

It hath been objected too against the book of Ecclesiastes, that some passages in it savour of irreligion, some of immorality. But these in truth are either innocent, when rightly interpreted; or else express, not the wise king's sentiments, but the false opinions of others, whom he personates to confute them; or however not his deliberate sentiments, but such hasty wrong notions, as during the course of

* Gregory the Great, *De Curâ Pastoral.* Part i. c. i. p. 5. saith, the Psalmist wrote *Ps.* lxvii. 23. *non optantis animo, sed prophetantis ministerio.*

† Rom. xii. 14.

his enquiry after happiness rose up successively in his mind, and were on mature consideration rejected by him, to fix at last on the true basis, *the conclusion of the whole matter, to fear God and keep his commandments, because he shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil**.

The Song of Solomon hath likewise given offence to readers of more delicacy than judgment. But they would do well to recollect, that the intimate relation between God, or Christ, and the Church, is figured by that between husband and wife in many places, both of the Old and New Testament, particularly in the 45th Psalm, which (though the scene of it be laid in higher life) seems to have given occasion to this Song; that very indearing and improving reflections naturally rise from so interesting a comparison; that describing the intercourse by metaphors drawn from the pastoral state, is extremely agreeable to the simplicity, the humility, the mildness of religion; that the devotional, as well as other affections of the eastern people, are extremely warm; and that none of their allegories (especially such a one as that in question) are ever to be applied minutely: but we are to lay hold and dwell on the principal points; of love to God producing felicity; negligence, desertion; penitence, forgiveness: considering most of the rest as mere ornament, adapted with much condescension to the turn of the nation and the age.

But difficulties have been raised in relation to the prophetical books, as well as these. Directions, it is said, are mentioned as given in them to the Prophets, which appear improbable and unfit. But then we

* Eccl. xii. 13, 14.

may justly think, as the ablest of the Jews themselves have thought, that several of these were executed in vision only: a supernatural impression was made on their minds, by which they seemed to do what in fact they did not, that so they might be enabled to deliver their message in a more affecting manner. And who shall prescribe to God, how to communicate his revelations? Other strange things really done by them, were done in consequence of the universal custom, then in use, of instructing persons by actions, which are natural signs, along with, or instead of, words, which are but arbitrary ones. And if that custom had not been so proper and convenient, as perhaps it is; yet God's compliance with it, whilst it obtained, was undoubtedly gracious and fitted to produce good effects.

Again, some have complained, that the language of the Prophets, above the rest of Scripture, is often harsh and coarse, dark and peculiar; and on these accounts ill adapted to common benefit. But surely it is also, very often, extremely natural and easy, convincing and persuasive, alarming and forcible, graceful and engaging. Wherever it seems exceptionable therefore, large allowances must be made for the boldness and consequent obscurity of the original tongue, especially in poetry: which yet in all tongues, is more affecting, and more easily remembered than prose; and on these accounts prudently chosen in many parts of the prophetical writings. But indeed the stile of the oriental people on every subject, except in their history, is lofty and concise, abounding in strong and expressive figures, carried often to strange lengths, above regarding the little niceties that we think so essential, full of quick turns and abrupt transitions. Without such ornaments as these a

composition would appear languid and despicable to them; who, being the persons originally and immediately interested in the sacred books, ought surely to be more considered than we, who come so long after. And yet even we, with due attention, may discover, not only the utmost sublimity of sense in the hardest passages, but the most exquisite beauties of speech, profusely scattered throughout, like the riches of nature through the globe; though, like them too, with a magnificent negligence and irregularity, which little wits ridicule, and great ones admire; and pious hearts very justly reverence, as the worthier of God, the remoter it is from the laboured correctness of man. But had the Jewish language (while they spoke Hebrew or Chaldee, or when afterwards many of them spoke Greek) been still more obscure and ambiguous, than we must own it to be, and had that defect been less compensated with the advantages of expressiveness and grandeur than it is, yet this was not the fault, either of the Prophets, or of the Apostles. They would of course learn and use the stile of their countrymen: they wrote probably as well in it, as any other good men of their time: and God was not bound to teach them to write better. For how far he would extend his aid, was entirely in his own choice: and we owe him inexpressible gratitude for the *things* he hath communicated, how little soever he might interfere in directing the *words*. But indeed had they been endued with ever so great excellency of speech, they could have applied to their hearers or readers in no other phrases, than such as they comprehended, were accustomed, and would hearken to: and the difficulties arising from hence in the sacred writings were unavoidable.

But here a farther complaint is made, that in several places they are designedly guarded against being clearly understood. And we own they are: for the subject required it. Predictions too plain might hinder their own execution: as, in many common cases, the previous publication of a thing, which else would certainly have been done, will prevent it most effectually. And therefore they ought to be formed in the manner they are: so as not to betray the intention to every one prematurely, nor yet leave room to any one for doubting afterwards, to what event the prophecy related. Had all the particulars of our Saviour's life and death, which are foretold, been too distinctly set forth to be mistaken or overlooked, the Jews would have taken care they should not happen; and have justified their rejection of him by the failure. Again: had the kingdom of the Messiah been every where described by the Prophets as intirely a spiritual one, in which all mankind were to have an equal share; that perverse nation, on hearing, that their civil polity and ceremonial worship was all to be abolished, would either, from contempt, have grown negligent of it, and thrown it off too soon: or else, from fondness for it, would have suppressed or corrupted the passages, declaring it should cease: which Providence designed them to preserve, for an evidence against themselves, as they have proved to be. And therefore the Gospel days are prefigured by a mixture of temporal images with others, liable to be misunderstood before the time of explanation came, but soon apprehended then by every fair mind; though still open to the cavils of others, who, to use the terms of St. Peter, *stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed**. Not

* 1 Pet. ii. 8.

appointed to be disobedient: but appointed, since they would be disobedient, to take their own course and the consequences of it: to *stumble* and fall at difficulties, of which they would easily have seen the proper solution, and so got over them unhurt, had they but modestly begged, and dutifully followed, the divine illumination.

I cannot proceed now to the objections, which have been raised against the usefulness of the books of the New Testament: and therefore contenting myself at present with recommending to your consideration what you have heard, shall conclude with the comfortable, yet awful words of the Prophet: *who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein**.

* Hos. xiv. 9.

SERMON XXI.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God: and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

HAVING undertaken to shew you

I. That Scripture is of divine authority;

II. That it answers every purpose of religion;

III. That we ought to read and study it diligently;

IV. How we may do this to the best effect:

I have finished the first head, and made some progress in the second, the complete usefulness of holy writ. The direct evidence of this I laid before you, fully I hope, though briefly, for it lies in a small compass: by proving, that in the nature of the thing, books inspired to give men the knowledge of religion must be in the highest degree profitable for that end; by specifying their own express declarations, that they are so; by referring you to the experience of innumerable multitudes, that have found them so. Then I proceeded to answer the several objections raised against the truth of this assertion: some of them general, that the Bible is not so short, so plain, so methodical as one should have expected for the benefit of mankind; some again particular, and levelled against several things recorded in its several parts.

To these I gave solutions, as far as the Old Testament was concerned. Let us now go on to the New.

The history of our Saviour is written there by four Evangelists. And some tell us their narrations differ in so many things, that the reading of them is perplexing, and even their authority doubtful. But what are these things? the words, related in one Evangelist, as spoken on such or such an occasion, vary from those in another. But perhaps the words that are in each were spoken successively: or each puts the Hebrew words which he heard, into his own Greek, by a stricter or a freer translation, but still without altering the sense. Again, one sets down facts, which another omits. But this is no proof of contradiction. For they professedly omit many facts, which they knew to be real. One of them passes over things, because another before him had related them. Hence probably St. Matthew and St. Mark omit several particulars, which are in St. Luke, who wrote first. And St. John, who came last, supplies a great deal, which the others have not, and writes very little which they have; excepting the history of our Saviour's death and resurrection, which it was fit they should all have. Thus no single Gospel containing every thing, (though it did contain every thing necessary) each of them was shorter, and therefore much more commodiously obtained at first, when books were written very slowly, and sold very dear; so that he who could not procure the four, might however furnish himself with one: and we may now have the joint benefit of them all. But, farther, when they seem to be relating the same fact, the circumstances differ. And they may be different, yet consistent. Or if they be inconsistent, they are two facts, and not one, though in some respects alike.

For our Saviour might, at various times, both perform miracles and deliver discourses nearly akin, and yet really distinct. Still after all, even allowing for these things, it is not easy to make an orderly history of our Saviour's life and instructions out of the four Evangelists. For they did not think it, nor was it always, requisite, to mark down the order, in which things happened. They might, for one good cause or other, relate such of them together, as were not done together: but then, as they do not say they were, this is no falsehood. And learned men, agreeing in the main, though not in all particulars, have brought them to a harmony each with the other, only by allowing a very few things to have been transposed in one of them. But were the attempt harder than it is, our edification from our Saviour's discourses depends very little on the time, or place, or other circumstances, of their delivery. Common persons need not attend to such points at all: and persons of more ability will find both a trial of their impartiality, and a reward of their labour, in studying them. Indeed were the ablest men incapable of reconciling all difficulties, it doth not follow, that they are irreconcileable. Or though they were, the consequence would be only, that the divine superintendency, under which the authors wrote, extended not to such minute circumstances, though it did and must to doctrines and precepts, and principal facts *. Not very much therefore would be lost by this: and one advantage would be gained; that these diversities would still more evidently shew, (what indeed the whole air and manner of their writings shews,) that

* Concerning this matter see Gaussen, *de Verbo Dei*. §. 64. &c. See also Archbishop Potter's Lectures, p. 141, &c. where the opinions of Erasmus, Episcopius, Grotius, &c. are stated.

the Evangelists are absolutely free from all imputation of concerting their story together, to deceive mankind: the assurance of which makes good amends in respect of usefulness, for any perplexities we may find in adjusting their accounts.

Another complaint is, that our Saviour's parables, which make up a considerable part of his doctrine in the three first Evangelists, are obscure, and some of them purposely made so: and that a great deal of what he saith in the fourth is not clearer. But it should be considered, that parables were not only an admired way of teaching then, but a valuable one in their own nature; as they excite attention, please the imagination, and fasten upon the memory. And nothing can be more intelligible, or more beautifully persuasive, than most, if not all of our Saviour's parables, and other discourses, are now, and were in a very short time after his own days. Some of both indeed appeared, and were designed to appear, otherwise, when he spoke them. But these were accommodated with the utmost prudence, for letting in light upon his hearers by gentle degrees, which, if poured on them all at once, would have been too strong for many persons of good meaning, but whose prejudices required to be gradually worn off; and would have furnished handles to bad people, for decrying him successfully, and destroying him, before his ministry had taken due root. Perhaps it may be thought, that to the latter some of his censures were too severe, and some of his answers not direct enough. But they came from one, who knew the hearts of men, and spoke too what he saw there. The persons, to whom these censures, or these answers, were particularly directed, felt the propriety of them, though possibly the rest, even of the by-

standers, were unable to perceive it: no wonder then if we are less able. And yet the writers of the Gospels could do no otherwise, than set down what he said, just in the manner that he said it, however dark it might be to us, or to themselves.

But his precepts also, as well as others in Scripture, are said by some to be so general and undetermined, that without proper limitations of them, (which all men will not think of making, and few can make in every case rightly) they must either lead us into errors, or leave us uncertain what we are to do. Yet concise maxims of sententious wisdom have always been esteemed in all nations extremely useful, notwithstanding that somewhat remained to be supplied in them by the common sense of the hearers or readers: which must indeed be done, more or less, in every thing written or spoken. And a book, that should be framed to give rules of action in all the particular circumstances of every case that would happen, would be much too voluminous for vulgar use and too intricate for vulgar understandings: whereas rules that set the heart right in the principal points, will go a great way towards setting the conduct right in all. Besides, there is in general, very small danger, that precepts of piety and morals will be taken in too comprehensive and severe a sense. And therefore the main business is, to make them comprehensive and severe enough, which it will be allowed the Scripture hath done; and yet with such openings for the rational interpretation of them, that there is no one command, in the Gospels or elsewhere, of which the most illiterate person, who is at all attentive and discreet, may not sufficiently apprehend the just bounds; either by his own comparison of them with other texts, or however by the

help of such further instruction and explication, as in worldly affairs men are well content to ask and receive, and would scarce know any thing upon earth without it. If people have not ability and leisure enough to find out their duty, from the directions in the Bible, much less would they ever deduce the whole, or any considerable part of it, from its first principles, by the mere light of nature. And whatever pretences are made, that the injunctions of Scripture are not determinate enough, the true inward objection commonly is, that they are two determinate against some favourite inclinations: whereas, were men left to make a system for themselves, they could easily mould and bend the laws of conduct to their own liking.

Against the usefulness of the Acts of the Apostles, which is evidently very great, I think there are no peculiar exceptions taken, worth mentioning here. For the difficulties, raised on some points of history in the speeches of St. Stephen and Gamaliel, are not material, and have been sufficiently cleared up. But heavy charges are brought against the Epistles of St. Paul, authorized, we are told, by St. Peter himself, who affirms, that *some things in them are hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction* *. But doth St. Peter mean here to censure St. Paul; whom he calls, in the preceding verse, his *beloved brother;* who, he saith, *hath written according to the wisdom given unto him,* that is, from above: and to whose writings he refers Christians for fuller instruction concerning what he himself is teaching? Certainly not, unless he censures the other Scriptures too; for he speaks of them all

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

in just the same terms. And therefore he only gives a caution concerning passages, which, either from the abstruseness of the subject, the impropriety of explaining it fully at that time, or God's purpose of trying the reader's fairness of mind, were involved in some obscurity. And even of these he doth not say, either that not understanding them at all would be dangerous; for, though useful truths, they might come short of necessary ones, or might be more intelligibly taught elsewhere;) or that all persons would be in danger from understanding them wrongly; but only *the unlearned*, that is, unacquainted with the doctrines of religion, for he speaks of no other learning; *and the unstable*, or unsettled in their dispositions, who have no root of steadfastness in faith or practice. Nor doth he say of these, that weakly mistaking such passages might be *their destruction*, but violently *wresting* and torturing them, to ill senses, for ill purposes. By usage of this kind, a hard text or two may be wickedly perverted to contradict ever so many plain ones, in the most necessary articles of belief or duty: and the condemnation of such as do it, and persist in it, is just. But how can any argument be drawn from hence, to disprove the usefulness of the sacred books? The books of nature and providence, it will surely be owned, are useful, and to be read by all men. Yet are there not, in them likewise, *things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable*, which the most learned and best grounded, (in their own opinions) *wrest* to the service of atheism, infidelity, superstition, immorality; and so ruin themselves in the next life, perhaps in this too?

Doubtless the Epistles of St. Paul are in many places difficult. In some he pours out the abundance

of his knowledge and piety so copiously, that common capacities are unable to receive it all, seem lost amidst the profusion of it, and are forced to let a great deal flow by unapprehended, at least till after frequent attentive readings; in every one of which however they imbibe most refreshing and strengthening nourishment. Sometimes again, indeed often, he visibly refers to the then present state of the several churches; to various questions, which they had proposed to him; to customs entertained by them; to erroneous notions, remaining or started up amongst them: which notions too he appears to confute, now and then, by reasonings taken from other notions of theirs, possibly some of them erroneous likewise, or however doubtful; that so, by entangling them in their own mistaken persuasions, they might be induced to throw them all aside, and take up juster and more consistent principles. Now as we have no other knowledge of these things, in our days, than we can collect from the Epistles themselves; no wonder, if we are sometimes much at a loss. But to the persons who received them, we have cause to think, they were very intelligible: and the condescension of arguing with them in their own way must be very obliging, and the effect of the whole thoroughly convincing: else they had not continued to honour him and his writings in the manner and degree, which we know they did. Nor is it very hard for us now to understand the far greatest part of them: and the profit well repays the labour. But the parts of more general and especially practical use, which make a large share of the whole, we cannot avoid understanding. So that on the whole his own words concerning his teaching are perfectly justifiable: *If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are*

lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not *.

To the Epistles, which follow St. Paul's, no considerable objection is made. For, as to any pretence of difference between him and St. James, about faith and works, the former evidently means only, that neither observance of the peculiarities of the Mosaic law, nor the exact observance of any law, is requisite for our acceptance with God, but faith in his covenant of forgiveness through Christ: and the latter means only that this faith must be such, as produces an honest and diligent, though not faultless, performance of such works as that covenant describes; otherwise it is dead and fruitless; which two doctrines are perfectly consistent, and absolutely necessary to the comfort and direction of mankind.

The concluding book of Scripture, the Revelation of St. John, is accused of obscurity, and consequently of uselessness, perhaps beyond any other. But it should be observed in regard to this and all of them, that it may be very material, in religion as well as in philosophy, to have some information about matters, which yet we can understand but very imperfectly: and though there were more things than there are, not all understood now; yet these either have been understood by those, whom they concerned formerly, or will be understood by those, whom they shall concern hereafter: as unquestionably in nature many things, which have never been cleared up, nor their uses known as yet, will be cleared up in time to very good purpose. And who can tell how glorious a light may one day burst forth, and how seasonably, from the darkest and least regarded prophecies both of the Old Testament and the New, to confirm the evidence and

* 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

illustrate the doctrines of Christianity? But in the mean while, they exercise very beneficially the industry of many, the humility and reverence of all. Though we should never find the meaning of some of them, we may, by searching after it, find that of others unexpectedly, as happens in various cases besides. And further still, be some parts of Scripture ever so unintelligible, we have this comfort, that they cannot make the clear ones unintelligible too.

Yet here it is answered by the bolder sort of objectors, that nobody can say, what is clear in Scripture: there are diversities of opinion about the most fundamental points of revelation. Every thing is disputed; every disputant alleges what he calls plain texts in his favour: and how can there be a stronger proof, than from this fact, that the whole system of the Bible is obscure and uncertain, and therefore of little use? But consider: Are not the fundamental points of natural religion, of morality, of civil government, disputed too? Have not all the principles of science, the credibility of history, the very evidence of sense, been controverted? And doth not every body appeal to plain reason in these controversies, just as they do to plain Scripture to those of theology? And do they not all make a shift to say something plausible for themselves, or against their adversaries? And will not this be always the case, as long as there are in the world conceited or perverse, ignorant or inconsiderate, interested or ambitious persons? But must we therefore give up every thing for doubtful, and useless? Or if not, why must we give up Scripture? Why not trust ourselves, that we see what we do see, there no less than elsewhere, notwithstanding that there may be persons, who pretend to see the contrary? Infidels venture to be very positive in their

notions, though the ablest, the best, the generality of men reject them, though they differ widely amongst themselves about them; though, when searched to the bottom, they are unspeakably more difficult to understand, and more unsatisfactory, so far as they are understood, than ours. Why then do we suffer them to unsettle us by pleas, that hold stronger against themselves?

Another very material consideration is this. However dark and perplexing some would have the Bible thought, in fact it is certain, that wherever it hath been respected and carefully read, the very lowest of the people have had infinitely juster sentiments of God and their duty, than the highest in other places. The passages which it is pretended must needs give them wrong and gross ideas, of the divine nature and attributes for instance, of a future state, or of any thing else, do in reality scarce ever produce that effect in any of them; but either they understand the boldest figures, easily, or at least know they are but figures; and therefore though they may not apprehend them, distinctly, they are not misled by them at all. Indeed the very foundation of that whole way of arguing, which confident persons use on this subject, is wrong: and we need not embarrass ourselves about the particulars of it so much as we do. They have suggested, that if Heaven vouchsafed a revelation to mankind, it must certainly be the most beautiful composition, in the clearest language and the most regular method possible; every thing must be fully explained in it, nothing capable of being contradicted or doubted; and every part of the world must be put in possession of it. Now we find that this is not true of the Old and New Testament, and therefore some are inclined to question, whether indeed they

are gifts of God, or, however, gifts of any extraordinary value. But the same persons might just as well have suggested, that all the knowledge he gives us by natural means also must be easily acquired, perfect and universal: which we experience it not to be. God hath provided remedies for the diseases of our bodies: the greatest blessing we have, next to those for the wants of our souls. But * many of them were unknown to mankind till very lately, are known but to few now, perhaps very many, that will be known, are not discovered yet. Multitudes have believed in medicines and methods of no use at all: several of the best have been despised, rejected, ridiculed; fierce and long disputes have arisen about the nature and benefit of others; and perhaps, after much pains taken, much uncertainty still remains: the most efficacious and approved are often disagreeable and disgustful; unskilfully or dishonestly applied, they have often very bad effects, and oftener yet produce their good ones but slowly and imperfectly. Yet we cannot, and we do not doubt but there are such things as real remedies, which a kind Providence, deserving our sincerest thanks, hath bestowed on us. And why then should we hesitate about the divine original, or sovereign usefulness, of the Holy Scriptures, merely because they are attended with some disadvantages of the same sort? Indeed whatever way of reasoning would prove, that our Maker is obliged to relieve either our temporal or spiritual disorders in the manner we could wish, will prove equally that he is obliged to prevent both: the contrary of which we daily feel. Therefore suppose the Bible had such imperfections in it, as it hath not, no more would follow, than that God hath extended his

* See Bishop Butler's Analogy, p. 265, 266.

direction and assistance to the writers of it only to a certain degree: we could never conclude that he had not directed and assisted them, as far as the purposes of religion required. It may be said he could have guarded it against all possible misconstructions, and objections. But perhaps not without making man a different creature from what he is; for weak men will stumble, and wicked men cavil, at every thing: or not without making Scripture so different from what it is, that on the whole it would have answered the several ends, for which it was designed, less than it doth. It may be said farther, that at least he could easily have guarded it against many of the objections, which have been made. But perhaps he foresaw, that if he had, others would have been made in their stead: or he thought fit to exercise the industry of some persons, and try the uprightness of others. In short, we must suffer the all-wise God, both to govern his world, and to reveal his will, in his own way.

But a careful and judicious inspection will shew in his word, as it doth in his works, not only that beauty and use abound much more than was conceived at first view; but that many imagined deformities are real excellencies! and many seemingly worthless or inconvenient things, necessary or beneficial: whereas the finest pieces of human art seldom fail of sinking in their character upon accurate examination and frequent review. There are passages in Scripture so lofty, that most eyes are unable, without help, to see their meaning distinctly. And why should there not be things above common reach, to excite and reward the attempts of the able and diligent; to prevent their being satiated with plain doctrines alone, till they grow weary of them: and to give them the pleasure of communicating, and others of receiving

from them, the discoveries they make: just as, in worldly affairs, God hath appointed, that some shall be rich and charitable, others poor and thankful; and thus hath provided in the best and wisest manner for all? There are again passages of such great simplicity and plainness, that they appear to some low and flat. But then, not only different subjects and manners of treating them, require very different styles; but all nations and ages have their peculiar forms of expression, their circumlocutions and repetitions, which, however mean or tedious they may seem to others, yet seem to them graceful and proper: and such as endeavour to teach and influence them (as the sacred writers did the Jews and first Christian converts,) do well to comply with established usage in these things, even though they could mend it. For this reason the authors of the New Testament, had they been masters of the most elegant Greek, would have acted wisely in preferring to it that vulgar kind, which the persons, to whom they wrote, ordinarily used, and understood better*. Besides, artless and unadorned narrations and exhortations are best suited to common capacities: and carry in them some evidence, that they are not contrived to amuse and deceive: for in that case they would have been more laboured, and ornamented. We have no cause therefore, from the roughness and uncouth prolixity of some parts, to think Scripture ill calculated for the profit of its readers; amongst

* See Mosheim's Cogitationes de interpretatione SS. litterarum, p. 176. where he defends the unpolite style of Scripture, as most intelligible to the generality, and supports his defence by the authority of Orig. contra Cels. l. vi. And Sext. Emp. lib. i. adv. Mathematicos seu lib. i. c. 10. adv. Grammaticos, §. 234. p. 265. Ed. Fabr.

whom its first readers were first to be regarded: but we have much cause from the dignity, the persuasiveness, the energy of other parts, to conclude *it is the power of God unto salvation* *: for else, *whence had these men all these things* †? We have no cause in the least to blame it for what we do not comprehend; but abundant cause to admire it for what we do; and to argue, like Socrates on reading the works of Heraclitus: "So much as I understand is excellent, and therefore I believe the rest is so too." We want to have the Bible, each according to his natural disposition, or acquired way of thinking, every where sublime, or easy, or elegant, or methodical, or copious, or concise. But God hath most wisely made it *all things to all men* ‡: hath furnished it with the clearest and most mysterious, the loftiest and most familiar, the closest and most diffuse, the best connected and the abruptest passages: all perfectly suited to his gracious purposes: and it is monstrous perverseness in us, to make each his own capacity the measure of the whole; reckon every thing, that happens to rise above us, unintelligible; every thing, that condescends to those beneath us, contemptible; and so on.

But then farther we ought to consider, that the latest books of the Bible are near 1700 years old, the earliest many ages older still: both parts of it written in languages, that have been long out of common use; and the first in one, of which we have no other remains approaching towards its antiquity; and which therefore, were it ever so accurate and beautiful originally, is incapable of being perfectly understood at present. Now these things, and, what must

* Rom. i. 16. † Matth. xiii. 56. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 22.

accompany them, a great diversity of customs, and modes of speaking, from ours, without defeating, or obstructing, the general design of Scripture, must of necessity obscure the beauty, and even the meaning, of particular places; and prevent in some measure its appearing to us what it is in itself. The same is the case of the ancient fine writers among the heathens. Yet none of them was ever despised on that account by men of judgment: but they are studied and illustrated, and their latent excellencies pointed out with the greater care; and perhaps the more admired, for being less obvious: and large allowances are made for those perfections, which must have been formerly visible, but are no longer so. Now surely we ought to judge of Scripture with equal fairness and regard.

Besides, as all ancient books in the world have suffered more or less by the negligence of transcribers, and the injuries of time, yet without the loss, or any considerable diminution, of their usefulness by it: so may the Bible. It is much better guarded against wilful corruptions, and even casual mistakes, in material points, than any other old record, by the vast multitude of copies, taken early, dispersed every where, read in public, weighed in private, quoted in sermons, conversations, books, and remaining in the hands of all different sects of Christians, who would of course watch one another to prevent any attempts of making alterations. Accordingly we find, and have great cause to adore Providence for it, that neither during the long reign of Popery hath any text been changed, whatever may have been tried, to favour their tenets, nor do the various readings of the manuscripts or translations of any church upon

earth, affect any single fundamental of faith or practice. But still even small errors in copying may have rendered passages of less moment, (for in these they would be likelier to escape observation) defective, harsh, contrary to grammar, inexplicable; may have broken connexions, that once were plain; raised seeming inconsistencies, where at first there were none: but particularly may have altered names, and increased or lessened numbers, which in all books are very apt to suffer by transcribing. And the various disadvantages, under which any parts of Scripture may be justly supposed to lie, from such accidents as these, must in all equity be charged, not on itself, but on the blameable carelessness of mankind. God was not obliged to work miracles to prevent them: but we are obliged to honour duly whatever comes from him, though we cannot enjoy it in its original perfection. Length of time hath not diminished at all in any thing essential, nor very considerable in any thing else, the usefulness of the sacred writings: which, I hope, hath now been satisfactorily proved and vindicated.

But the text asserts them, not only to be useful, but completely useful: *that*, by their means *the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*: the minister of the Gospel fully provided with what he is to preach, the believer with what he is to learn. I cannot enlarge on this point, and surely I need not: for the proof is short, and the objections easily obviated without naming them. If the Scriptures are inspired, what they say of themselves is true; and they say they are sufficient to salvation, plainly in the text and elsewhere, and imply it throughout. The Old Testament was sufficient

in its time: how can we doubt, but the New is now? How can we imagine, that in a volume of such bulk written by different persons all under the direction of God, professedly for instructing mankind in religion, and containing so many discourses of Christ and his Apostles for that purpose, any thing necessary is omitted? besides, we can know no more of Christianity with certainty by any other way, than we know by this. Oral instruction would answer the end very well for a time, and did so: and therefore St. Paul very properly directs the Thessalonians to *hold the traditions, which they had been taught, whether by word, or by his epistle**. But things, delivered by word of mouth only, are soon lost or changed; and false and mischievous traditions rise up instead of the true; as the Jewish Church had then experienced: and therefore the Christian covenant was put in writing by the first publishers of it, as the preceding was by Moses. The Christian writers, who succeeded the Apostles, were confessedly fallible, and consequently unworthy of equal regard with them: nor did they attempt to make any additions to the rule of faith and manners, comprehended in the Bible. On the contrary, they held, as we do, that all essential articles are to be found there: and so did the following ages too: till at length the rulers of the Church of Rome, having set up notions and practices, which the Scriptures did not warrant, were obliged to pretend, (but very falsely) that they were taught by the ancient fathers or delivered down by memory. And they decreed in the council of Trent, 200 years ago, that such traditions were to be received with the same respect, as holy writ. But let us rest on

* 2 Thess. ii. 15.

surer ground: *build on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone**; and on all occasions appeal *to the law and to the testimony: for if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*†.

* Eph. ii. 20. † Is. viii. 20.

SERMON XXII.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God: and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

In discoursing on these words, I have already proved,

I. That Scripture is of divine authority:

II. That it completely answers every purpose of religion.

And therefore I now proceed to the next head, proposed in the beginning, which is

III. That we ought to read and study it diligently.

This duty follows with the clearest evidence, from its inspiration and usefulness. For if we may neglect what was written under so peculiar a direction of God, for our guidance to eternal happiness, to what can we possibly ever be bound to attend? And yet I fear the consciences of many, if not most of us, can too easily inform us, how little we regard, how seldom we look into, these books. We exclaim against it perhaps as the wickedest tyranny in the church of Rome, that it prohibits them to be read without licence. But do we ourselves make much more use of our Bibles in the midst of the fullest liberty, than if they continued to be locked up from us! Do we not spend a very small share of our time, of our leisure time, in looking into them, compared with what is

wasted in the idlest occupations and amusements? The hours, which we allot to reading, do we not more commonly, and with far more pleasure, employ them on any other sort of reading, the most insignificant, the most corrupting and pernicious, than on this? Are there not multitudes, who can hardly name the time, when, even on the Lord's day itself, they read a chapter, with the serious intention of improving their souls? Nay, the few, (and very few I doubt they are at present,) who think of religion in earnest, do they not usually apply to other books chiefly for instruction in it, and study the sacred volumes far less, than the compositions of fallible men?

These are facts as notorious, as they are lamentable. And therefore I shall

1. Consider, in order to remove, the causes, from which so wonderful a contempt of God's word hath arisen.

2. Produce his commands for paying it a very different regard.

3. Shew, what evils follow from disobeying these commands.

1. I shall consider the causes, from which this wonderful contempt of God's word hath arisen.

Now the more general causes doubtless are, the original corruption of our nature, indisposing us to every thing good: (against which, if we value our interests in a future life, we ought to watch continually:) and our consequent acts and habits of sin, which we very absurdly suffer to drive us from the Scripture, that we may be easy in them, instead of having recourse to the Scripture, which would excite us to an effectual reformation of them. Another very extensive cause is the wrong education of our youth. They are very little taught, in comparison of

what they should, (if they are taught at all) either by their parents at home or their master or tutors afterwards, to be reverently conversant in the sacred writings, and yet less instructed how to profit by them. Hence they are unacquainted with their history, their doctrines, their language: have no early impressions made on them in favour of what they contain; and so, when they are grown up, ignorantly slight them, sin without any restraint from them, and are easily induced to join with scoffers in ridiculing them. All this might be much otherwise, if they, who educate children, were but near so careful about it, as true piety, or even common prudence, would lead them to be.

Other causes, or excuses, for neglecting to read Scripture are, the various objections made against it, many of which you have heard confuted; and the disagreeableness arising from the peculiarity of its style, of which also I have spoken. But such as can read it only in a translation, (and the rest are a very small number in proportion,) will be tempted to complain of it still more than others: whereas they ought to acknowledge, that they are less qualified to judge, and therefore less intitled to find fault. For all translations, especially from writings of distant countries and ages, lose a great deal of the spirit, the strength, the elegance, and often the clearness too, of the original. Besides, ours is a literal translation. Even the most figurative and poetical passages, and the remotest from our whole common manner of expression, are almost always rendered word for word, without aiming at beauty, but merely at faithfulness. It is incredible, to any but men of skill in these matters, how great a disadvantage this must be. Scarce any other ancient book could appear tolerable in such a

dress, but the Bible: and that suffers by it extremely. Yet if this method had not been chosen, if any fine passages had been brought into a fairer light, any harsh ones softened, any dark ones explained, any turn of a sentence made more forcible or more pleasing, by taking only such freedoms, in a moderate degree, as are taken, to a very great one, in most or all other authors, that we translate; the same persons, who complain of flatness or obscurity now, would have complained of artifice and unfairness then. And surely the scrupulous fidelity, which hath been shewn on this occasion, well deserves in return the candour of making all due allowances. Amongst these, a very great one is to be made on the following account, that even this translation was published above 150 years ago; when multitudes of texts were not near so well understood, and consequently could not be so rightly expressed, as they have been since; when also our language was different, in several particulars, from what it is at present; and therefore though it hath been happily secured, by the common use of our Bible and Prayer Book, from changing so fast as it did before, yet some phrases in both are become less intelligible, and a great many less proper and graceful, than they once were: not to say, that the utmost propriety and accuracy was not in those days very strictly regarded. Besides, every book of the Bible hath, for the convenience of quotation, been divided, many ages after it was written, into chapters, not always quite so judiciously separated, as they might have been; and these chapters again into very short verses, which persons are too apt to consider as independent sentences; and thus often mistake the meaning, but oftener still overlook the otherwise plain connection and force of argument in

the sacred writings: perhaps imagine that there is none, and that studying them is to little purpose. Nay, lastly, the very expositors of Scripture, whose profession is to assist men in reading it, and whose utility for that purpose, upon the whole, is very considerable, yet sometimes discourage them from it. For commentators, in all books on which they labour much, and therefore above all in the Bible, on which they have laboured most, frequently perplex what without them would be clear enough; either from partiality to their own notions, or vanity of finding out something new, or desire of seeming to differ from others where they do not, that they may not seem to copy them when they do.

All these things contribute to lessen the esteem of the Bible with some, perhaps more than is imagined: for though they may seldom be proposed as direct formal arguments against its usefulness, yet they are secretly and artfully thrown into the scale, so as to weigh a great deal on that side of the question. And many, who will not allow, or, it may be, do not perceive that they think the worse of Scripture for them, yet are kept by them, more or less, from the serious reading of it. But evidently both sorts of persons act very unreasonably. For the original is not in the least answerable for the defects of translations, or for any other human imprudences. And though it cannot, by the best translations, appear in all its primitive splendor; yet in the worst (and ours is far from being such,) it exhibits every thing necessary to the obtaining of eternal life, which alone might sufficiently recommend it to our most reverend respect and diligent meditation. However, besides this, under its greatest disadvantages, if we attend to it judiciously, we shall find in it, (as critics, by no

means prejudiced in its favour, have confessed) far nobler and more striking beauties, and in far greater plenty, than in any or all the writers of heathen antiquity.

But the internal hindrances (if I may call them so) of studying Scripture, have not been the only, or perhaps the chief ones. Others of strong influence have proceeded from outward and accidental circumstances. When restoring the knowledge of it had overthrown the dominion of Popery over this and several neighbouring countries, (an event, which ought to make it for ever dear to us,) the spirit of controversy, once raised on that subject, was unnecessarily extended to so many others, that the word of God came to be considered by too many in scarce any other light than as furnishing materials for disputes: and so the following generations began to grow weary of them and it together. Another misfortune was, that frequently men, not the best qualified for interpreting even the plainer parts of it, blinded with new light, undertook without fear the most difficult; and fathered upon the Bible whatever absurdities had started up in their own imaginations. Besides, not a few in the last century, from an affectation of uncommon esteem for it, introduced its peculiar phrases on occasions of so little dignity, grafted so freely still more peculiar ones upon them, and used both so improperly and unseasonably, that others, from disgust of their language, contracted no small dislike to that of Scripture itself. Nay, I fear, that the sacred writings have not had sufficient justice done them even in the pulpit. We are apter to dwell on general subjects, than to explain particular passages; and afraid to break the force of a reasoning or an exhortation by intermixing

with it the exposition of a text. In some degree this may be right: but I doubt we carry it too far, especially as we have no separate expounding of Scripture, which discreetly conducted would be unspeakably useful. And thus the people have been left sadly ignorant of a great part of their Bibles. Now these things coinciding in our days with a higher degree, than ever the world knew before, of that self-opinion, which despises the doctrines of revelation as irrational, and that rage for self-indulgence of every kind, which renders its precepts and threatenings insupportable, have produced an absolute scorn of it in great numbers, and a strange indifference towards it in almost all. So that now mere custom and fashion is thought sufficient to justify, and even require, if we are well bred, a total and avowed neglect of this important book; without spending a moment on the disagreeable examination, what plea it hath to urge for being studied as the law of our lives.

Yet visibly these inducements for disregarding it, are, if possible, more groundless than the foregoing. Some have made wrong and absurd uses of it. Why should that hinder us from making the right and wise one? Some are conceited, or vicious, or fond of applause from the weakest of their fellow-creatures. Why should not we, notwithstanding that, be humble and virtuous, and seek the approbation of our Creator? Let us therefore determine, that neither bad reasons nor bad examples shall ever move us to slight the holy Scriptures: and carefully divesting ourselves of the prejudices too commonly arising from them, let us proceed

2. To hear the divine commands for reading and honouring it.

Every manifestation of God's will implies in its

very nature a command to hearken to it with our deepest attention: and his word could be written down for no other end, than that all persons concerned might peruse them frequently, and bear them always in mind. But that none may pretend ignorance of his purpose, he hath declared it expressly. Moses charges the Israelites: *Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me; take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget them, and they depart from thy heart: but teach them, thy sons and thy sons' sons, that they may learn to fear him all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children* *. God himself charges them: *Lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and teach them your children, that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children* †. He charges Joshua in particular: *This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success* ‡. The first Psalm saith the very same thing of every pious man: *His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law will he exercise himself day and night: and whatsoever he doth, it shall prosper* §. Nor are we to study the precepts only, but the rest. Isaiah, speaking of the completion of a prophecy, directs the people: *Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read* ‖. When the rich man in the parable was desirous to prevent his brethren from coming into the same place of torment with himself, Abraham said unto him, *They have Moses and the Prophets: let them hear*

* Deut. iv. 5. 9, 10. † Deut. xi. 18, 19. 21. ‡ Josh. i. 8.
§ Psalm i. 2. 4. ‖ Is. xxxiv. 16.

them *. When the Jews were venting their prejudices against our Saviour, he exhorts them: *Search the Scriptures: for in them ye think*, meaning, and rightly think *ye have eternal life; and they are they, which testify of me* †. St. Paul tells the Romans, that *Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning* ‡. Now we cannot question surely, but the New Testament deserves equal attention with the Old. The proof which you have had, of its inspiration, proves that at the same time. The Gospels, *written that men might believe, and believing have life* §, must be read to produce that effect. Of the Epistles we may judge by the care which St. Paul took to have his communicated and spread. He inscribes his first to the Corinthians, not to them only, but to *all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord* ‖. He requires the Colossians, when that which he addressed to them *is read amongst them, to cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans* ¶. He *charges the Thessalonians by the Lord*, in the first Epistle, which they had from him, that it *be read unto all the holy brethren* **. Doubtless the other churches too understood his mind in this matter. And St. John in the beginning of the Revelation, a book that seems the least fitted of any for common use, takes care to say, *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear, the words of this prophecy* ††.

These excellent men could not mean, that only the Christians of that generation were bound to read their writings. They knew the following ones would have the same and greater need, in proportion to their distance. The following ones for three cen-

* Luke xvi. 29. † John v. 39. ‡ Rom. xv. 4. § John xx. 31.
‖ 1 Cor. i. 2. ¶ Col. iv. 16. ** 1 Thess. v. 27. †† Rev. i. 3.

turies and more, knew it themselves; employed their thoughts on the sacred books principally, carried them about in their bosoms, gave up their lives rather than part with them: and such as through fear delivered them to their persecutors to be destroyed were censured by the authority of the church; and branded, in the common speech of the faithful, by the infamous name of Traditores, from which the word traitor is derived into our tongue.

In vain are we told then, that the Scriptures contain passages *hard to be understood*, and therefore are not fit for vulgar inspection. St. Peter, who said they did *, made no such inference. The primitive Christians, who experienced it as well as we, never thought nor heard of any such. In our Saviour's conversation with his Apostles there were things, extremely hard to be understood: ought they then to have been debarred from it? Let us not aim to be wiser than God. He hath given us his Word, not for a snare, but for a light and a guide. Every blessing which we have, indeed puts us to some trial: and this tries our fairness of mind, our diligence in collecting the articles of our faith and practice, our gratitude for what he bestows, our submission to his good pleasure in what he withholds from us. But he that hath engaged us in this work, if we use our faithful endeavours humbly, will not fail to support us under the difficulties of it; and the going through it as we ought will be suitably rewarded. Were the pretended dangers therefore, in the study of Scripture, much greater than they are, yet this is the method, which God hath appointed for our spiritual improvement; and which having appointed, he will render effectual. Let us trust him therefore to instruct us in his own

* 2 Pet. iii. 16..

way. By the reading and preaching of his word, however unpromising the means might seem, he raised up his church at first, notwithstanding all the violence of Jews and heathens: and by the same he will uphold it for ever, against all the scoffs and cavils of infidels. *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men: and the weakness of God is stronger than men* *. Our only concern is to perform the duty, which he hath commanded: and we shall certainly receive the benefits, which he hath promised, each in the manner and degree, that his case requires.

But as you have already seen the profitableness of Scripture to every purpose of religion, you have seen by consequence the advantages of being conversant in it: and therefore I shall now go on to invert the prospect, by shewing you, as I proposed,

3. The evils, which follow from disregarding the injunctions of God in relation to it.

Were those injunctions in themselves of no great moment, yet they come from the Almighty: and refusing to take notice of them is losing the recompence of so much obedience, and incurring the penalty of so much disobedience. But they are indeed of moment unspeakable, in several respects. The sacred writings are the source of our religious knowledge: and without an acquaintance with them, we shall be liable to ignorance, uncertainty and mistake, even in points of the greatest importance. Thence arose the false doctrine of the Sadducees, to whom our Saviour says, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures* †. Nor is the danger less in respect of practice. Neglect of holy writ must introduce a neglect of its author, on more accounts than one. How shall persons keep themselves easy in not looking into a book, which their

* 1 Cor. i. 25. † Matth. xxii. 29.

Maker hath appointed to be written for their use, and required them to use continually, but by thinking as little and as lowly of him as they can? Therefore they will be strongly tempted to every thing, that may assist them in such impiety: and will soon, alas, find themselves able to make large advances in that high road to ruin here and hereafter. Again, Scripture places before men, in every page, the most affecting proofs and descriptions of the holiness and justice, the wisdom and power, the goodness and mercy, the continual presence and never ceasing agency of him, who is the Creator, the Benefactor, the King and Judge of all. It makes known to us the inexpressible condescension and love of our Redeemer, the perfect reasonableness and purity of his law, the need and means of obtaining the sanctifying influences of the blessed Spirit, the infinite importance of preparing for our unchangeable state. If then, for want of attending to Scripture, the impressions of these objects wear out of our minds, as they must; all the seriousness which they are fitted to produce, will wear out of them at the same time; spiritual and eternal things will be less and less in our thoughts, (consult your own hearts, I entreat you, whether you do not find it so) till at last we shall come to live and act as *without God in the world**. Particularly, what we are bound to do and abstain from is laid down in the Bible much too clearly to be misunderstood or evaded. But if once we leave off looking for our duty there, we shall soon mould it within our own minds into what shape and size we please, till we bring it in effect to nothing. For even supposing, that we begin our neglect with no such intention at all, yet bad inclinations will creep in upon

* Eph. ii. 12.

us, one after another; and not meeting with the proper check, will increase and multiply, we cannot easily suspect beforehand to what degree.

It will be said perhaps, that reading other good books, which are shorter and clearer, may supply the omission of reading Scripture, possibly on the whole to advantage. But they, who once grow weary of the latter, seldom, I believe, continue long to make any considerable use of the former: and therefore this plea, for the most part, is only a pretence. Or were it sincere, as unquestionably it sometimes is, other books have not, and cannot have, the authority in what they affirm, in what they require, in what they promise and threaten, that the word of God hath: *the word* which our Saviour hath declared *shall judge us in the last day* *. Joined with this, and confirmed by it, the compositions of men are of great efficacy: but when they are separated from it, the case is unspeakably altered. We shall be apt to pay as little regard, as we think fit, to mere human writers: and overlook, or call in question, whatever we do not like. Yet sometimes again we shall be in danger of paying them too much regard, and so being led by them into false notions, which may give us uneasiness without need, or comfort without ground, or into superstitious practices, which may discredit our holy profession. What followed in the middle age of Christianity when men left off and were discouraged from reading the word of truth, but that they were *turned unto fables* †? Lying legends were believed: pictures and images were first gazed at for instruction, then worshipped. They *forsook the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out broken cisterns, that held no water* ‡, but draughts of poison: whereas what we

* John xii. 48. † 2 Tim. iv. 4. ‡ Jer. ii. 13.

learn in Scripture, we learn from the spring-head: and not only every thing it teaches is right, but its very silence is instructive. For if any thing is not made there a necessary part of our faith or practice, no power on earth hath a right to make it so: and had but believers invariably kept to this book, as their rule: all the corruptions of Christianity, and all the wickedness of every kind produced by those corruptions, had been happily prevented. Besides, were we to embrace every thing right, and nothing wrong, that we find in other pious treatises; yet there is a peculiar energy in holy writ, which is not in them. Its denunciations are more awful, its convictions stronger, its consolations more authentic, its warnings more alarming, its expostulations more penetrating. The bare reflection, who it is that speaks, cannot fail to make them so in a very considerable degree: and he hath added a supernatural force to them over and above. *Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces* *. *The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* †. Whence accordingly the efficacious and converting preacher, is he, *not* who comes *with inticing words of man's wisdom* ‡, but who, like Apollos, is *mighty in the Scriptures* §. *He that hath my word let him speak my word faithfully: what is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord* ‖.

But farther: by omitting to read and consider the original charter of our religion, from which our whole knowledge of it is derived, persons will be unac-

* Jer. xxiii. 29. † Heb. iv. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. ii 4.
§ Acts xviii. 24. ‖ Jer. xxiii. 28.

quainted with the language of religion. And hence they will first blindly stumble and cavil at the phrases of Scripture, not knowing them to be such: and afterwards learn to despise them, though they do know it. The offices of the liturgy, especially the occasional ones, that recur seldomer, will seem strange and unaccountable to them. They will repeat the Psalms in the congregation absolutely without meaning; neither seeing in their own persons, or applying to their own use, the things that suit them; nor thinking at all, to what sort of persons, or good purposes, the rest relates. They will hardly ever pay attention to the lessons, epistles, and gospels, but look upon them as pauses and breaks in the service, to be filled up as they please; or if they do hearken to them, yet not understanding many parts of them, will receive little benefit from them; and possibly misunderstanding some, will receive harm: entertaining injurious opinions of the sacred oracles from what they hear out of them, in this imperfect manner, instead of the honourable and useful sentiments, which would have been revived in their breasts, had they applied themselves beforehand to an orderly perusal of them with proper care. Then as to sermons, on which commonly the chief reliance for instruction is, they, who are not sufficiently versed in the Bible at home, will be unable to judge of the proofs we bring from it here, or the general conformity of our preaching to it. And elsewhere they will be misled by the sound of scriptural words, used in a sense which the writers never intended; and so be like *children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive**.

* Eph. iv. 14.

Now it is not our desire to impose on your ignorance, but to appeal to your knowledge. We wish, we beseech you, to imitate the Bereans, commended so justly in the Acts of the Apostles, as *more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.* It follows, *therefore many of them believed* *: effectually no doubt.

Another very important use of searching the Scripture is, that in the midst of that deluge of evil communication, which overflows this wicked land, to a degree that no country, calling itself Christian, ever experienced before, few persons can avoid hearing, more or less, unfair and even ludicrous representations made of one part or other of God's word; which may be too likely to pass upon them for just ones, unless they are previously so well skilled in it, as either to know in particular the true vindication of the passages abused, or at least to know in general, that it cannot be liable to the imputations, which profane people would cast upon it, because the spirit of the whole is inconsistent with their suggestions. If indeed they themselves would but take the trouble of understanding what they take the liberty of burlesquing, it would save them the guilt of many a blasphemous reflection, and the shame of many a silly jest. But at least persons of better dispositions will surely be persuaded to so rational a method of guarding against the infection of their pernicious irreverence. Possibly some will reply, that irreligious thoughts and temptations to unbelief may arise from what occurs to us in reading the Bible ourselves, as well as from what others occasionally say of it. But

* Acts xvii. 11, 12.

certainly the danger is far less: and the greatest part of that may be prevented by observing such rules for the safe and useful performance of this duty, as persons, one should imagine, would of course lay down for themselves, or at least will see to be reasonable, when proposed to them; as God willing, they shall be to you the very next opportunity. And if still any difficulty and trial remain, yet coming in our way, when our minds are in a serious and considerate state, disposed to examine impartially and reverently, as in the presence of God, and to beg, that his *spirit* would *guide us into all truth* *; there will be no doubt of obtaining, on due enquiry, competent satisfaction.

I shall only say this farther, to shew the evil of neglecting the sacred writings, that they are what makes us to differ from the gentiles, *which know not God* †, for even our natural religion is borrowed from them; and they can be useful only by being read: that when the church of Rome had almost suppressed them, Christianity was buried under falsehood, superstition and wickedness; and when they were restored to common use, true piety, virtue and liberty, were restored by their means: that those nations and those persons, who attend to them with the highest respect, are the most sincerely, the most steadily good: and that in proportion as we of this nation have disregarded them, we have grown unsettled in our faith even of what reason teaches, profligate in our behaviour, unmindful of public or private real welfare, and visibly ripe for speedy destruction.

Let us all therefore instantly to the right way, before it is too late. The poorest of us, if he hath not a Bible, may have one, either by purchase, for he lays

* John xvi. 13. † 1 Thess. iv. 5.

out much more in a few weeks on matters of far less necessity, or by the charitable gift of some pious benefactor. And the busiest of us may and must find time for every branch of the *one thing needful**. Every person hath at least several hours of the Lord's Day, and some little share of others, for the exercises of religion: but many of us have much more leisure; not all of it perhaps innocently, and a great deal of it not prudently employed. Spending a due part of it on the divine law would both dispose and enable us to spend the rest, whether devoted to worldly affairs or to relaxations, with truer cheerfulness now, and to a better account at the Great Day. We have most of us at times heavy sufferings: and poor supports are any others, that we can use under them, compared with theirs, who *by patience and comfort of the Scriptures have hope* †. The most cautious of us have frequently violent assaults from our spiritual enemy: and we cannot arm ourselves against him more effectually, than as our Lord himself did, *with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God* ‡. The strongest of us have sad remains of weakness, the discreetest of injudiciousness: and the surest remedy for both is that of the son of Sirach: *Let thy mind be upon the ordinances of the Lord, and meditate continually in his commandments: He shall establish thine heart, and give thee wisdom at thine own desire* §.

* Luke x. 42.
† Rom. xv. 4.
‡ Eph. vi. 17.
§ Ecclus. vi. 37.

SERMON XXIII.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God: and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

I HAVE shewn you, in several discourses on this text, the divine authority of Scripture, its complete usefulness to all the purposes of religion, and the consequent duty of reading it. Yet still I am sensible an unhappy objection may remain with too many, that they have tried, and do not experience this usefulness; and why it should be their duty to persist in reading what they do not find attended with any good effects, they cannot apprehend. But if they have not read as they ought, their whole argument falls to the ground. Nothing is to be expected from the wrong performance of any duty: and therefore I proposed originally

IV. To give directions for the right performance of this.

Many proper ones, I hope, have been intimated to you not obscurely, under the former heads: part of which however I shall now repeat amongst others. For to say again *the same things, to me is not grievous, and for you it is safe**.

That we should come to the word of God with

* Phil. iii. 1.

serious minds, is a requisite, that one should hardly have thought needful to mention, if there was not some, who give little other proof of ever having looked into it, than perverting the expressions of it to ludicrous purposes, and so extracting poison from the bread of life. You need not be told, that such can receive no improvement from it: but only be warned against suffering them to infect you with the same distemper: for to men of a gay and lively turn it is often very catching. But reflect: every book in the world, of every sort, may easily be turned into matter of diversion, if people are resolved to shew at any rate, some their ability, and others, (which is far the more usual case) their desire only, of being witty. But especially on sacred subjects, the corruptness of men's hearts disposes them both to invent and receive such kind of entertainment with peculiar eagerness: for this very reason principally, that they know they ought not. And besides, the Old and New Testament do lie somewhat opener to profane abuse, than many other pious compositions, from the difference of stile and manners in distant ages and countries, from the scrupulous exactness of our translation, and the changes in our language, that have happened since it was made. But surely there are strong motives, of religion, of prudence, of common decency, to restrain men, from taking such unfair advantages, to so bad an end; if this contemptible affectation of appearing ingenious, by forcing a laugh out of every thing, did not so effectually destroy, as it doth, all regard to rightness of behaviour and true good sense. *A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy to him, that considereth* *.

* Prov. xiv. 6. It is wrongly translated, *understandeth*.

Let us therefore never permit ourselves to make either in thought, at the time of reading the Scripture, or in discourse afterwards, a light and burlesque application of any text: for how little harm soever we may intend, the practice is plainly unfit and irreverent: besides that we are soon led on from small freedoms to greater. And let us never be influenced to think ill or meanly of the least part of God's word from any such applications made by others: for they prove nothing against Scripture, but much against those who invent or use them. Or if we find, that, notwithstanding, they do in fact begin to make impressions upon us, as they may imperceptibly, if we are not on the watch; let us avoid, as carefully, yet as inoffensively, as we can, the company of those, who delight in such dangerous conversation: according to Solomon's excellent rule, *cease, my son, to hear the instruction, that causeth to err from the words of knowledge**. For as to any hope of good from arguing with them, no people upon earth are so incapable of being convinced or silenced by reason, as they that are conceited of a libertine wit. And therefore, however entertaining their talk may be otherwise, yet being essentially faulty in this respect, let us consider it only in the strong, but just light, in which St. Paul places the idle discourse of some in his own days, when he saith, *but shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness; and their word will eat, as doth a canker*†. They, whose learning and judgment and taste and worth are the most universally acknowledged, have in all times down to our own, spoken and thought of the Bible with the highest degree of honourable regard. And it is no less absurd, than impious, to

* Prov. xix. 27. † 2 Tim. ii. 16, 17.

be hurried into despising and ridiculing it, either by the extravagant flights of any man's wild fancy, or the graver authority of judges so evidently prejudiced, as the self-sufficient, or the dissolute, merely because they are grown of late more numerous and less modest. Let us at least observe a little first, what good effects this new kind of wisdom produces in the lives and families of those, who are so fond of it; and wait a while to see, (if indeed it be not too visible already,) what sort of figure they themselves, and a nation composed of them, or led by them, make and are likely to make in the eyes of the present and future ages.

With due seriousness we are to join due reverence in reading Scripture: and *receive it, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God**; and therefore credible. The revelation, which he hath given us, cannot indeed contradict the reason which he hath given us: and therefore we must never construe it irrationally. But it may easily contradict our fanciful notions and favourite conjectures: in which case we are to *cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*†.

Nor is it less our duty to subject all our vicious inclinations to the authority of holy writ, than our vain prejudices. For if we indulge but one, it will naturally bias us to reject, or misinterpret, whatever is inconsistent with it: and besides, we shall lose the hope of that illumination, without which we can apprehend nothing to good purpose, whence the angel saith to Daniel, *none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand*‡. And our Saviour

* 1 Thess. ii. 13. † 2 Cor. x. 5. ‡ Dan. xii. 10.

promises only*, that *if any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.*

But with whatever good dispositions we may read the Scripture, unless we read it also attentively, we shall fail of our end. If we perform it only as a task, we shall find it a wearisome one. If we consider spending so much time in it, without care to improve by it, as a work acceptable to God on its own account: this is cheating ourselves with a false and superstitious notion of piety: and much more so, if we imagine, that employing one part of the day thus will in the least atone for doing, in any other part, what we are forbidden.

Now attentive reading will present to our view a variety of things, that will affect us very differently. And the benefit or the harm we shall receive from them, (for we may receive either,) will greatly depend on the conduct, which we observe amidst them. If we have never been used to read the Bible, or have long disused it; some passages in it will probably seem very strange to us at first: as undoubtedly the whole frame of nature, and the whole tenor of Providence would seem, were we let into our present knowledge of it all at once, instead of being made acquainted with it by slow degrees. They therefore, who come with a disposition to object and cavil, may have abundant room to exercise it. They, who insist on being satisfied in all particulars, will be greatly disappointed in many. For every one must not hope to discover whatever may be discovered. Or if he could, most of our inquiries into the scheme of religion, revealed or natural, as well as into the constitution of the material world, if pursued to the

* John vii. 17.

utmost, will at length terminate in something which we do not and cannot know. So that men must prepare themselves for what they will be sure to meet with; must expect to find some dark, and some hard sayings. On these they must never put a bad sense; but are neither to be offended at all, nor wonder much, if sometimes they are at a loss how to put any: but believe implicitly, (for this is faith in God, not man,) that there is some, worthy of the rest: and not think of forsaking their guide to Heaven, merely because they perceive not the design or propriety of every sentence, that he speaks to them on the road. In short, they must reason and resolve, if need be, like the holy Apostles in the sixth of St. John: who were doubtless perplexed and staggered not a little at our Saviour's discourse, recorded there: but when *many of his Disciples went back* upon it, *and walked no more with him*, and *Jesus said unto the twelve, will ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life**.

Persons thus rightly disposed will immediately see farther, that as they are not to be disgusted with Scripture, because they cannot account for every thing or understand every thing to their wish; so neither are they to study it merely to understand as much of it as they can, which is only indulging an unedifying curiosity; and yet less, to understand more of it than others, which is nursing up vanity, and may tempt them to invent new and even dangerous meanings, in order to seem more knowing than they are. But their business is, to apply to those points first, and dwell on those most, which have the closest connection with their future happi-

* John vi. 66, 67, 68.

ness: for they are necessary; the rest are only, in their several degrees, useful. And as right practice is the end of faith; and the firmest and most explicit faith, which doth not produce it, is nothing; and a weak and general faith, which doth produce it, will be accepted: the practical passages ought certainly to have our principal regard; ever comprehending those, which express the obligations of Christian piety and moral self-government, as well as justice and mercy. We shall indeed do very well, besides occasional readings of particular chapters, to peruse both Testaments in their order: only it will be advisable to begin with, and go oftenest through, the New; as exhibiting what we are to believe and to do, more fully, and without such a mixture, as there is in the Old, of things belonging solely to the former dispensation. But the regularity of this course ought not to hinder us from selecting chiefly, and perusing most frequently, such passages of both, as lay before us, in the most influencing manner, the common doctrines and common duties of our holy profession. Other things may with safety be lightly passed over, and imperfectly or not at all understood, till we are first well settled in these: which very happily are the plainer parts of Scripture, as well as the more important.

Still even in respect of these, and much more therefore of others, it is requisite, that we proceed with some judgment and care: that we make use of the same rules for understanding our Bibles, which we do for understanding other books; and such also, as the peculiar nature of this book points out: that we never interpret any text in a sense contrary to the dictates of reason, or to other texts more clear or more numerous, or to the visible design and drift

of the whole passage: that we keep always in our view what goes before and follows after; for the connection is often very strong, where it is not extremely obvious: that we suppose not every verse to be a separate sentence of itself; nor every chapter to have a separate subject, that begins and ends with it; for these divisions are intirely human, and sometimes not discreetly made; but that we read on without stopping, as far, and no farther, than the same matter appears to be continued: and, (which is a direction of great moment) that we apply the sayings of the holy penmen, only to the things of which they are treating, not to others, which perhaps were far from their thoughts; unless a just argument can be drawn from the former to the latter. We should also be careful to take both single words, and phrases comprehending several, not always in the meaning which they bear in our daily conversation, but in such as other places of Scripture require or permit; understanding them literally where we can, but figuratively where we must: should make such abatements from strong expressions, such restrictions and exceptions to general expressions, and such allowances for the whole manner of speaking, as we perceive the nature of the thing, together with the usage and custom of the sacred writers, demands. Without such equity as this, in some degree, one half of the compositions, that appear in the world, would be heaps of absurdity. And if the Bible needs more of it, than later books of nearer countries, it also deserves it infinitely better: and refusing it is both perverseness and impiety. These easy cautions will enable persons of almost the lowest capacity and improvements that either can read Scripture, or have the means of hearing it read, to acquire so competent

a knowledge of what is most needful to be known, as will fully justify the Psalmist's encomium, that *the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple**.

Not that even the learned, and much less the illiterate, act either with humility or prudence, if in reading holy writ they rely wholly on their own judgment unassisted. For God hath made the help of others extremely necessary to our understanding of his word, as well as his works. Men of great abilities and attainments, by trusting to themselves, have gone sadly wrong: and men of no other advantages, than a teachable disposition, have arrived at a most beneficial acquaintance with religious truths. For God *hides things from the wise and prudent* in their own opinion, which he *reveals unto babes*†; *resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*‡. Nor let it be imagined, that such must therefore depend altogether in every thing on the authority of their spiritual guides. For as in matters of science, or common business, what a man doth not see of himself, he may have shewn him notwithstanding, and then see it as truly and fully, as if it had been his own original discovery: so in matters of revelation, one, who would otherwise have made small progress, or, it may be, great mistakes, yet having the main articles of it methodically explained to him, in discourses on his catechism, and occasionally inculcated in sermons, or answers to the questions which he asks in private, may, by comparing what he is thus taught, with what he reads in his Bible, come by degrees, not to believe implicitly, but to discern, evidently, the genuine sense of its fundamental doctrines

* Ps. xix. 7. † Matth. xxi. 25. Luke x. 21.
‡ James iv. 6.

and precepts. In which case his faith rests no longer on the word of man, but that of God, whether we can answer all the specious objections against it or not: which few people can do in any thing that they believe of any kind. We should therefore conscientiously take all fit opportunities of learning instruction from those, who are set apart to give it. For the *priest's lips* are appointed to *keep knowledge:* and the people to *seek the law at his mouth**: not with a blind submission to whatever he shall affirm; but with so much regard at least, as in other professions the more ignorant pay to the more skilful. Nor are we confined to respect only the sentiments of the particular teachers, whom we statedly attend, but ought to have much greater deference for the general persuasion of Christ's Church, particularly our own branch of it, and a proportionable one for that of every knowing and good person; always entertaining some distrust of ourselves when we differ from these. The exercise of our best judgment, and a modest attention to that of others, are the joint means, which our Maker hath instituted for the understanding of his will, natural and revealed. They, who use them uprightly, and they alone, may hope for pardon of their ignorance and errors. And were any one to continue so ignorant to the last, as to believe the truths contained in holy writ, only because those about him told him they were such: yet might he have the happiness of acquiring even by the means of this most implicit faith, dispositions of piety and virtue unattainable otherwise, and sufficient to qualify him for eternal happiness.

But sometimes Christians of a deeper insight, real or imaginary, into Scripture, instead of complaining,

* Mal. ii. 7.

like others, that necessary doctrines and precepts are not clear enough there, are tempted to think them expressed so much more familiarly, and repeated so much oftener than needed, that the places, in which they are inculcated thus, may be passed over, as not designed for such, as they are. Now, would they but consider even the least entertaining of them for a competent time, with a spirit of seriousness, there would start out of them information or admonition, of which they little think, and for which they have great occasion. Or should they find nothing that is new to them, they would at least have cause given them to recollect with humble thankfulness, not only that their Christian brethren do, and *are made wise unto salvation* * by these despised plain passages, and by these only, but that from them, above the rest, proceeded all that knowledge of the redemption of man, and almost all that knowledge of natural religion also, which the most learned enjoy; and which hath made even the vulgar of the gospel dispensation superior to the ablest and best instructed amongst the heathen: a superiority, which will be lost again, in proportion as regard to the word of God decays.

But though, in reading it, we must all begin with attending, and ever after attend chiefly, to the first elements of Christian instruction, or, to speak in St. Peter's language, *as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby* †; and know it for a bad sign, if we cannot relish the food of simplest taste, and easiest digestion: yet keeping to this wholly is the business of those alone, who, as the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it, *are unskilful*, or rather *unexperienced, in the word of righteousness:* which hath in it also *strong meat, belonging to them*

* 2 Tim. iii. 15. † 1 Pet. ii. 2.

and proportionably dark: for which reason our attention must be chiefly paid to those others, which will amply recompence it, by exhibiting the noblest and most pleasing views of the majesty of the Almighty, of the patriarchal religion, of the exquisite beauties of humanity and charity, of the hard struggle of human virtue with heavy afflictions, and God's gracious acceptance of imperfect endeavours. *Ye have heard of the patience of Job: and have seen the end of the Lord; that he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy* *.

As to the Psalms: I have already explained to you the nature of those, which contain imprecations. Of repeating them all in the church, I shall, God willing, speak some other time. Of reading them in private, I need only say, that with the exercise of but a common degree of judgment, every pious person will find it equally improving and delightful.

The Proverbs have scarce any obscurity, and much use. Concerning Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, you have had, I hope, sufficient instructions for perusing them with benefit.

The prophetical writings abound in difficult passages; but still more in plain ones, expressing the sublimest notions of piety and morals, the strongest preference of inward goodness to outward observances, the awfullest denunciations against wickedness of every kind, the most affectionate expostulations, the most inviting promises, the warmest and justest concern for public good: which the prophets manifested with so fearless and impartial a freedom, in telling both the body of the people, and the highest in authority, their duty and their sins, that the descendants of those, who persecuted them when

* James v. 11.

living, held their memories, when dead, in eternal honour; doubly convinced of their mission from Heaven, by the accomplishment of their predictions, and the singular worthiness of their conduct. In reading them therefore we must diligently attend to these interesting points, each in its proper place: observing also, along with them, the gradual unfolding of the great scheme of our redemption; to which *we shall do well*, even in these days of *opener vision**, *to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place* †; especially as it confirms to us, that *known unto God are all his works from the beginning* ‡. Such passages in their books, as relate to the affairs of distant heathen countries in ages long ago past, though of admirable use then, and not a little still as parallels, we are neither likely nor concerned to understand fully. And such as belong to things yet future, especially to the times and circumstances of those things, are few, if any, of them fit for the unlearned to pry into particularly. Nay, the learned themselves, if they are prudent also, will observe, what answer the angel gave to the prophet Daniel. *And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up, and sealed till the time of the end* §. When the proper season comes, possibly in some cases not before the event hath interpreted them, the prophecies will prove their own reality by their clearness; and strengthen, perhaps in an hour of much need, *the faith and patience of the Saints* ‖: Thus it happened to the Apostles. They understood not beforehand our Saviour's prediction, *destroy this temple, and in*

* 1 Sam. iii. 1. † 2 Pet. i. 19. ‡ Acts xv. 18.
§ Dan. xii. 8, 9. ‖ Rev. xiii. 10.

three days I will raise it up. But *when he was risen from the dead, they remembered, that he had said this unto them: and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said* *.

But almost the whole of the Gospels is now so clear, and both the character and the precepts of our blessed Lord appear in them so truly divine; the zeal and charity of the first disciples in the Acts is so highly edifying, the spirit of the Epistles so genuinely Christian, and their practical rules are so completely instructive to all sorts of persons: that scarce any other direction can be wanted for the main of the New Testament, than to meditate on it continually. Some of the argumentative and occasional parts of St. Paul's writings indeed it is not easy to comprehend. A yet larger proportion of the Revelation of St. John is exceedingly mysterious. But nothing of this kind, in any part of Scripture, needs either to discourage, or mislead us. Not to discourage us; for whatever is requisite to be understood, if it be put in one place obscurely, is doubtless put in some other plainly: nor to mislead us, because we may prudently suspend our judgment, and modestly be content with our ignorance of what is intended, though fully satisfied of its being a valuable truth. *Seek not out,* saith the Son of Sirach, *the things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above thy strength: But what is commanded thee, think thereupon with reverence: for it is not needful for thee to see with thine eyes the things that are in secret. Be not curious in unnecessary matters: for more things are shewed unto thee, than men understand* †.

Yet we are not to omit reading the abstruser texts,

* John ii. 19. 22. † Ecclus. iii. 21, 22, 23.

which have any appearance of relating to us: but follow the example of the blessed Virgin, who *understood not* several of our Saviour's *sayings*, yet *kept them all in her heart* *. Were we only to learn humility thus, it would be enough: but we shall come by degrees to apprehend far more than we expected, if we diligently *compare spiritual things with spiritual* †; darker expressions with clearer, that are like or opposite to them: for contraries illustrate one another. In this laudable work, the marginal references in the later editions of the Bible will afford you most useful assistance: for they are very judiciously chosen. Such information also as you can get, (and you may get much from several books,) of the nature of the language of each Testament, and the history and notions of the times, when each book of it was written, will be extremely profitable: and the several excellent commentaries and paraphrases on the whole, or particular parts of it, still more: which therefore it is wonderful that so few Christians in proportion, of those who are well able, will be at the expence of purchasing for themselves; especially considering how very much greater expences, that will turn either to no account or a bad one, they so little grudge, that they cannot be restrained from them.

But how successfully soever we may increase our knowledge of Scripture, that alone is nothing. We must not think we have done with a passage as soon as we have understood it. If we had understood it instantly, our principal work was to come yet: and they are strangely wrong, who apply so closely to study difficult places, that they forget to make due reflections on the plain. The word of God was

* Luke ii. 50, 51. † 1 Cor. ii. 13.

written to give us, not merely a speculative apprehension, but an experimental sense and feeling of holy things, comfortable or terrifying, as our spiritual state requires. *I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil,* saith the Psalmist *: *To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word* †. Too many, alas, have no conception of this efficacy in Scripture; and no wonder, for they have never seriously endeavoured to have any. But let them try in earnest, and they will infallibly succeed, if they use proper means. We read of some, what will be true of all in the same condition, that *the word did not profit them, not being mixed with faith* ‡. God indeed can operate according to his own pleasure: but humanly speaking, persons will not be influenced by what they disbelieve; or much, by what they believe but faintly. Nay should they labour to make the strongest impressions on their own souls, without applying to him, whose *gift* saving *faith is* §, their efforts would be in vain. But let any one jointly strive and pray for a deep conviction, that the Bible is the appointed instrument of his religious proficiency: then let him read it, not as performing a task, he knows not why, from which he had rather be excused; not to outshine others in readiness of quotation, or plausibility of interpreting, or *oppositions of science falsely so called* ‖; not to furnish himself with weapons for debate and controversy, much less for uncharitableness and abuse; but to amend his inward state towards God: that as the excellent collect in our liturgy directs, *by* the *patience* in well doing and *comfort* in virtuous

* Psalm cxix. 162. † Isaiah lxvi. 2. ‡ Heb. iv. 2.
§ Eph. ii. 8. ‖ 1 Tim. vi. 20.

suffering, which we learn *of his holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life* *. Let him accordingly stop on fit occasions, and think: what consolations doth this passage administer to me? What acknowledgements to Heaven doth this declaration require from me? What fear for myself doth this threatening call for? What duty doth this precept or pattern point out to me? of what sin doth it convince me? against what dangers doth it warn me? Is my character and behaviour suitable to this command or exhortation, this description or good example? or do I see myself here, under another name, reproved, condemned, stigmatized? Have I acquired that sense of my own sinfulness and weakness, of God's holiness and justice, of my need of the merits of Christ and the grace of the Divine Spirit, which the whole tenor of Scripture inculcates: or am I still inclined to stand or fall by my own righteousness? Faithful pains taken for some time in such home questions, without forcing unnatural uses out of any text, but only dwelling on those that fairly present themselves, will make us experience a divine virtue in the sacred writings, piercing first and healing afterwards: which, provided we are not satisfied with being piously moved at the time, and then relapsing into what we were before, but continue the inquiry steadily, and carry on every feeling into practice, will assuredly transform us into what we ought to be. Possibly indeed we may not all receive a very sensible benefit very soon. Alterative medicines often produce their effect but slowly: and the most perfect regimen of diet sweetens and nourishes by unperceived degrees. We have surely no title to be

* Second Sunday in Advent.

impatient under the hands of our heavenly physician: perfect recovery will at length be the certain consequence of his treatment of us: and every single ingredient in the great remedy, his holy word, and every direction for the use of it, will contribute its share to our cure. Let us therefore conscientiously observe all his orders, each in their due place; and as the only one, for which there is room left at present, let us intreat his blessing on our humble endeavours, that receiving the seed of *the word into a good and honest heart,* we may *bring forth fruit with patience* *: using for that purpose the petitions of his servant David. *Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law: yea, I shall keep it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments: for therein is my desire* †.

* Luke viii. 15. † Psalm cxix. 33, 34, 35.

SERMON XXIV.

1 COR. XIV. 15.

—*I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

THESE words, in their first and strictest sense, relate to those gifts of inspiration, which the primitive church enjoyed: the Holy Ghost then frequently enabling many members of it, besides the Apostles, to *speak in tongues,* which they had never learned, *the wonderful works of God* *; and dictating to them petitions and praises fitted to their circumstances. But, as the ordinary gifts of Heaven to mankind are left to be managed according to the discretion of those, who enjoy them: so the divine wisdom preserved an uniformity of conduct, and kept to the same rule, in respect of these extraordinary ones. *The spirits of the prophets,* as the Apostle tells us, ver. 32, *were subject to the prophets.* It was in their choice, when they would use the power of speaking with divers tongues: and on what occasions they would produce the prayers and hymns, with which they were inspired. In this, (and no wonder), they did not all of them judge always prudently; their thankful zeal to publish these miraculous favours, and perhaps a too great, but very natural, self-complacency in being possessed of such remarkable pri-

* Acts ii. 11.

vileges, prompting some of them sometimes to give demonstrations of it in their assemblies, when few or none were present, who understood the language they spoke: in which case the exercise of their endowments was only a hindrance to the stated, and though less admired, yet more useful devotions and instructions of the congregation in their native dialect. And therefore St. Paul, in the true spirit of Christianity, reproves this ostentation: reminds them, that the gift of tongues was designed to convince unbelievers by a seasonable use of it, not to provoke their scorn, or bring disorder into the Church, by an unseasonable one; that the other gift of PROPHESYING, teaching men their Christian duty, and exhorting them to the practice of it, (for this the word means here, and this the Jewish prophets made their chief business,) was a much more valuable thing, than that of speaking to them, or to God, in languages known to few of them; which therefore they should do modestly and sparingly; never indeed, but when the speaker, or some one present, was able to interpret what he said so readily and properly, as might edify the hearers; for their constant endeavour should be to exert all the powers of this kind, which the Holy Ghost had bestowed on them, rationally and discreetly, so as to inform and improve others. *I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also*: that is, every person endowed with supernatural abilities, of this or any other sort, was to think himself bound to employ them in so discreet a manner, that all around him might be instructed and benefited, as much as possible.

This, you will find, on carefully reading it, is the meaning of the text, and of the chapter in which it

occurs. And the whole shews, both the truth of extraordinary and miraculous gifts at that time; (for had they not been real, no directions about them could have been wanted, or would have been given;) and also the admirable wisdom and genuine goodness of the Apostle, in which we may well presume the rest to have been like him. He permitted not these accomplishments, wonderful and shining as they were, to interfere with the plain rules of order and edification; or to be at all set on a level with the humble virtue of Christian charity, doing good to men from love of God. Now such things as these are great confirmations of our holy religion, and do it great honour.

But though the first and immediate meaning of the text be what I have now explained; a more general instruction, and applicable to every age of the Church, may be justly drawn from it. The same Divine Comforter, who inspired the devotions of believers then, influences their hearts in the performance of them now: the same duty of using due precautions to make the service of the Church intelligible, which the Apostle pressed so strongly in his own time, equally subsists in ours: and therefore the words which I have read to you, comprehend two points of doctrine, as needful at present as ever they were.

I. That good Christians are assisted by the Holy Ghost in offering up their petitions and praises. *I will pray with the spirit: I will sing with the spirit.*

II. That we should be very solicitous rightly to apprehend the sense and fitness of what what we say and do in God's worship. *I will pray, I will sing, with the understanding also.*

I. That good Christians are assisted by the Holy Ghost in offering up their petitions and praises to

their heavenly Father. The *spirit of God* hath *striven* with bad persons *, and therefore doubtless effectually operated on pious ones, from the beginning of the world. The Psalmist, on his falling into sin, prays that God would *not take his holy Spirit from him* †. And more especially God promises, in the Prophet Zechariah, that he will *pour* on his people *the spirit of grace and of supplication* ‡. In the New Testament we are told, that *if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his* §; that *the spirit helpeth our infirmities* in prayer, *making intercession for us* ‖; that we are to *pray always with all prayer or supplication in the spirit* ¶, and *praying in the Holy Ghost to keep ourselves in the love of God* **.

But though it be undeniable, that the Holy Spirit, who indeed excites us to, and fits us for, every duty, doth not withhold his influence in this: yet how far they extend, is matter of dispute: and particularly between those who approve, and those who disapprove, liturgies or forms of prayer. And which are in the right, it shall be the principal business of this discourse to shew: not with intention to raise in you either hatred or contempt of any, who dissent from our Church on that head, (God forbid!) but only to make you more sensible of the propriety and advantages of the way you are in; and incline you to that proportionable improvement by it, which God will expect.

Some then apprehend, that there is such a gift or spirit of prayer, bestowed by the Holy Ghost on true Christians, and peculiarly on all that are worthy to be ministers of God's Word, as enables them to address themselves to Heaven, on all occasions, copiously and

* Gen. vi. 3. † Psalm li. 11. ‡ Zech. xii. 10. § Rom. viii. 9. ‖ Rom. viii. 26. ¶ Eph. vi. 18. ** Jude 20, 21.

suitably, in unpremeditated words of their own: which they think ought not be restrained by appointing forms, even for the public use of congregations. And sometimes the text is quoted in support of this opinion. But plainly, so far as it relates to words, it relates to words inspired; to which in the strict sense, but few of these persons themselves lay any claim: for indeed it would be equalling their own compositions to the holy Scripture. And excepting this miraculous gift of inspired prayer, the word of God mentions no gift of ready expression in prayer: nor have we the least ground to consider it as coming from above, any otherwise than as *every good gift*, every natural ability, which God had conferred upon us, and every improvement, which he qualifies us to make by our own industry, *is from above* *. For evidently this talent is one of that sort: depending partly on the fluency of speech, to which people are born, partly on the art and diligence, which they use to increase it; and varying as their health and spirits vary. Nor therefore is there any more harm in restraining this faculty if good reasons require it, than in restraining any other. Even the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, you have seen, were frequently put under some restraints: much more then may one of our ordinary powers. And they who call it limiting and stinting the Spirit, have no Scripture warrant, either for the phrase, or the thing which they understand by it. Nay supposing the Holy Ghost did ever so peculiarly assist in directing the words of prayer, why should we not think him as likely to have assisted in the drawing up of the established forms, as in the extempore performances of those who reject forms, and trust to the sudden dictates of their own fancy?

* James i. 17.

The *spirit of prayer* and *praying in* or *by the spirit*, are indeed Scripture terms: but so far as they belong to the present age, they signify, not being furnished with variety of phrases in prayer, but a much more valuable blessing, having religious affections breathed into us by the Holy Ghost for the exercise of this duty. And *quenching the spirit* *, in the only sense, which can be applied to us, means extinguishing such affections by indulging sin, or suffering them to die away through negligence. God is no more delighted with change of expressions, than with a repetition of the same: nor will ever be weary of a devout soul, for want of new language. Common reason pronounces this: and the Bible confirms it. We find several forms of prayer, prescribed on several occasions in the law of Moses †. We find afterwards a whole book of forms, the Psalms of David. We find our Saviour frequenting the Jewish synagogue, which constantly used a form, and a very mean one. We find him enjoining his Disciples a form of his own composing for them: *When ye pray, say, Our Father* ‡, and so on. Nay, at the very time, when the gift of inspired prayer was common, there is a strong appearance in the fourth chapter of the Acts, that the Apostles and their followers used a form, there set down. For how else could *they lift up their voice, and say it with one accord*, as ver. 24 assures us they did? Probably the very next age after them practised this method of public worship, at least in a good measure: and for more than 1400 years past it hath been without question almost universally the only one. There is not at this day a Christian Church in the world, but what uses in part of their service, if not throughout it,

* 1 Thess. v. 19.

† Numb. vi. 22, 23, &c. x. 35, 36. Deut. xxi. 7, 8. xxvi. 23.

‡ Luke xi. 2.

forms of human composition; excepting that of Scotland, which had one immediately upon the reformation, though it afterwards fell into disuse; and the dissenters from our own, who, notwithstanding, many of them sing in their assemblies hymns that are forms of human composition, without scruple. Yet if extempore prayers be required, extempore praises are too. For it is equally said, *I will pray with the spirit*, and *I will sing with the spirit*.

It may be replied indeed, that supposing forms of prayer lawful, they are not however expedient. But if that be all, so long as the vastly greater, and the ruling part think otherwise, ought not the rest to acquiesce? Is it not much less expedient to make a separation and division in the church, when Christ and his Apostles have so strongly prescribed unity and submission?

But why are forms of prayer inexpedient? It is argued, that they cannot be altered according to circumstances, which extempore prayers may. And, with respect to private devotion, the argument is so far of weight, that though even in this, forms well chosen are excellent directions, yet no one should confine himself closely to them, when his condition, spiritual or temporal, requires him to depart from them: but should omit, or add, or vary, as he perceives occasion; in which he may well hope, that God's Holy Spirit will guide him, so far as is needful. But the circumstances of whole congregations, taken together, are in the main almost always the same: and therefore may be expressed in the same words. Besides, public offices make a stated provision for the more usual accidents that happen: and public authority provides for the rest occasionally, from time to time. Indeed an established liturgy doth not allow

the cases of private persons or families, or the situation, real or supposed, of national affairs, to be enlarged on to God, at the discretion of the minister: a thing never necessary, and seldom proper. It is very sufficient, that they who desire the rest of the assembly to join with them in petitions or thanksgivings on fit subjects, relating to themselves, have opportunity afforded them of signifying their desire: and that general expressions in the service may be applied more especially to particular purposes by each member in his own mind, as he conceives there is need. If these things be carefully done, forms of prayer will be found not so often defective perhaps in the matter of uncommon and extraordinary wants or mercies, as extempore prayers in what is far more necessary, expressing common and ordinary ones.

But some insist, that whatever may be said, they experience, that forms do not edify, and excite devotion. And this may be true, while they are unaccustomed to them, and come with prejudice against them. But would they make trial of them for some time, with a serious endeavour of receiving benefit from them, they would not fail to find that true spirit of piety raised by them in their own hearts, of which we hope they would see many instances in their fellow-worshippers. It is true, a form doth not afford the entertainment of novelty. But that hath nothing to do with devotion. The hearer may be highly delighted, the speaker highly admired: and all this may be mere amusement of the fancy, and no prayer in reality, offered up by him, who is best pleased with it. What alone deserves that name, is a reverent application to God, from a deep sense of our necessities and blessings, and his power and goodness: which a form deliberately precomposed by the joint counsels

party-attachments of various kinds, with the requests and thanksgivings, which they utter in the name of the congregation; may inflame one part of the neighbourhoood, one part of their fellow-subjects, against another; stir up some to mischief, under colour of its being the cause of God; and by so doing, make his worship abhorred by the rest? I am far from charging the body of those amongst us, who use extempore prayer, with being guilty of these things now. I am only representing, what evils a more general use of it would be likely to produce, especially in times of public discord. Indeed most of them, if not all, it formerly hath produced: and preventing them is much easier and every way better, than punishing them.

But supposing these inconveniences avoided, another, very considerable, would remain. Let their dislike of forms be ever so great, the words of their minister in praying are as absolutely a form to them for the time, as the words of a national liturgy: but with this unhappy difference, that his expressions being continually varied, possibly the most judicious, at least the slower and more ignorant, may often doubt of their meaning; and the scrupulous, of their fitness: and though upon consideration they should be satisfied, yet he in the mean while is gone on to something else. And thus they may follow after him through the whole of a prayer, and be able to overtake and really join with him in but a small part of it: whereas a form may always be examined beforehand; and when it is once understood and found to be right, our judgment and affections will go together in the use of it, without let or hindrance; and we shall be edified, not in imagination, but reality.

Upon the whole, the reasons for a public liturgy are so strong, that Calvin, the most universally esteemed

by our dissenting brethren of all the reformers, in a letter to the protector of England, under Edw. VI. hath these words. "*As to a form of prayer and of ecclesiastical rites, I highly approve that it should be certain, from which it may not be lawful for any minister to depart: as well in consideration of the weakness and ignorance of some, as that it may more plainly appear, how our churches agree amongst themselves; and lastly, that a stop may be put to the giddiness of those, who affect novelties.*"

Still I am sensible, that some of the arguments, which I have urged against devotions composed by the minister, may seem to lie equally against sermons composed by him; and to require, that instruction be in a constant form, as well as prayer. But besides that one hath been the *custom of the churches of God**, the other not; prayer is the voice of the people to their Heavenly Father; and should therefore be preserved, with singular caution, from every thing, which they ought not to say, or may not immediately comprehend or approve; else, in such parts of the service, either they do not pray at all, or they pray amiss. But preaching is the voice of the minister to the people, which they may weigh and judge of at their leisure: and even should they fail of learning their duty from thence, they may learn it from a much higher authority, the lessons of Scripture read to them. Further, where a fixed form of worship is appointed, instruction may be left at liberty more safely; because it will be observed, if the latter contradicts the former: and also very usefully, because a much greater variety of things is requisite to be said to the people in sermons, than is needful for them to say to Heaven in their prayers. But

* 1 Cor. xi. 16.

how proper soever it may be to have some form, they, who dissent from us, apprehend there are such great imperfections and faults in the established form, that if they must *pray with the Spirit and with the understanding*, they must not pray by that. Now imperfections will be found in every thing human: and if these be a sufficient objection against our prayers, it will hold against their own and all prayers, excepting that of our blessed Lord. From every thing unlawful we are ready to prove that our service book is intirely free. But the faults of extempore devotions, which are different in every congregation, and every time of meeting in the same congregation, easily escape the notice of such as are prejudiced in their favour, who alone hear them: and when observed, it is only by a few, and they are soon forgotten: while those that are charged on a public printed liturgy, lie open constantly, year after year, to the censure of every one. And were it possible, that the several prayers offered up, in any one day, in the several dissenting assemblies of this kingdom, could be written down; and examined half so narrowly for a short space, as ours have been for two centuries together: can it be imagined, that many times more and worse omissions and improprieties would not be found in almost every one of them, than they have pretended to find in our Common Prayer? Still we are far from saying, it is incapable of any alteration for the better. Yet this we must say, that most of the alterations, proposed by some persons, have been thought by others, every way their equals, if not superiors, by no means to be amendments. And as eminent a nonconformist, as ever was, Mr. Baxter, hath long since owned, that almost every church on earth hath a worse liturgy, than ours.

harm, if we change ours a little more? Though after all, if the wearing of such garments by us of the clergy were a fault, it would be intirely our own fault: and seeing us wear them could surely hurt nobody.

But besides these general objections, there are several made against particular passages, which ought to be confuted. This therefore I purpose, God willing, to do in a proper number of discourses, on all the stated offices of our Liturgy: and not only to vindicate what is blamed, but explain also what too many may possibly not understand, and direct your notice to what may not be sufficiently observed. All these things will very well come under the head, of which I promised at first to treat,

II. That we should be very solicitous rightly to apprehend the sense and fitness of what we say and do in God's presence. For though censuring without reason is worse, yet esteeming without reason is not the part of wise men. And some perhaps are mighty zealous for our liturgy, who yet know but very imperfectly, what good reason they have to be zealous for it. Indeed amongst many advantages of public forms of prayer, there seems to be one disadvantage; that the words of them being in the main continually the same, and thus becoming well known and familiar, we often hear them, and even speak our share of them, with scarce any attention to them. But then it is equally true, that we often hear sermons, though they are new to us, with just as little regard; and therefore should be likely very soon to hear extempore prayers also with no less negligence: which fault our liturgy is in several respects peculiarly calculated to prevent, as I shall hereafter shew you. But still the danger is great enough, to demand our utmost care to guard against it. For

however good our public offices are in themselves, they convey no good to us, farther than we comprehend the import of them, and mind it: which, the better they are, the more they deserve from us. And on the other hand, were they ever so mean, this would be no excuse for omitting to get all the benefit we could from them; but a powerful motive, though a very unhappy one, to endeavour it most earnestly. Yet thinking them defective and blameable where they are not, or to a degree in which they are not, as multitudes have done, will naturally discompose, or deaden at least, our minds in the use of them: and therefore should be avoided, as far as it can. Now persons may indeed by their own private consideration enter very competently, both into the meaning and the grounds of most things contained in the liturgy. They, who are able to purchase a few books, may likewise receive much additional information from the several very useful paraphrases and commentaries upon it, that are extant. And they are much to blame, if they wilfully neglect either of these things. But still many cannot, and others are not likely to do them. To such therefore I shall attempt to give some instruction concerning the service, in which we join so often. The fewer need it, the better: but those who do, it is of importance to assist. For with the more understanding we pray, with the more pleasure and earnestness we shall pray. And as on our praying, as we ought, depends our obtaining God's grace and blessing; so on that depends our only true comfort in this world, and our eternal happiness in the next.

SERMON XXV.

1 COR. XIV. 15.

—*I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

FROM these words I have proposed to discourse on the two following subjects.

I. That good Christians are assisted by the Holy Ghost, in offering up their petitions and praises to God. *I will pray with the spirit: I will sing with the spirit.*

II. That we should be very solicitous rightly to apprehend the sense and fitness of what we say and do in his presence. *I will pray, I will sing, with the understanding also.*

The former of these heads I have finished: and after proving its truth, I made it my chief endeavour, to prove further, that this aid from above is not such, as to afford any argument against using public forms of prayer; of which I shewed you both the lawfulness and the expediency: answering, at the same time, some general objections against our own established form; but reserving the more particular ones for the second head: under which I promised to vindicate the principal things, which have been blamed in the stated offices of our liturgy; to explain such as may seem hard to understand, or liable to be misunderstood; and direct your attention to such, as

you may not otherwise observe sufficiently. To this I shall now proceed, following the order of the book.

But it will be proper first to take notice of the laudable custom, that every one, who comes to join in the devotions of our Church, should perform, at his entrance into his place, a short preparatory act of worship in private. Now this, as well as every thing else, ought to be done *with understanding:* not to be an unmeaning formality, in ignorant compliance with common practice; but a serious address to God, that he would enable and incline us to attend in such manner to what we are about to hear, and say, and do, that we may honour and please him, edify our fellow-worshippers, benefit and finally save our own souls. For which purpose, either these very words, which I have mentioned, may be used; or any others of the like import, chosen by ourselves; or, as perhaps is more usual, those expressive and excellent ones, that conclude the 19th Psalm: ***Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*** Only whatever our expressions are, we should be extremely careful not to make so very bad a beginning, as to put up this previous request either thoughtlessly or insincerely. And the same care should employ our minds throughout the whole. For that end, we should avoid, as much as we can, all needless, but absolutely all light and ludicrous conversation, even before the service begins. And after it is begun, the fewer of the more transient intercourses of civility are exchanged, the better. For surely they make a very unsuitable mixture with the awful words which we are hearing, or perhaps repeating, at the same time: and must in some degree take off our attention from them. Nor will it

be a less hindrance of our devotion, to remark over curiously, what other persons are present, what appearance they make, or how they behave. Let not these directions, I entreat you, either give offence, or be despised. Very good people, I fear the best of us all, transgress them inadvertently, more or less. But a moment's reflection will shew any one, that there is great propriety in observing them: and they will experience more advantage from it, than perhaps they expect.

Our service begins, as did that of the primitive Church *, with a preface, to dispose more completely the minds of the congregation to a reverent performance of the duty, on which they are entering: according to that precept of the son of Sirach, *Before thou prayest, prepare thyself* †. And this preface is composed of sentences of Scripture, with an exhortation grounded upon them. Nothing can so effectually awaken us to a pious frame of soul as the words of God, speaking to us. And the words here used, are very prudently selected. They all relate to repentance and confession of sins: which naturally stands first in the devotions of guilty creatures, as we all are. Till we feel a genuine sorrow for having offended God, and come to intreat earnestly the pardon, which is offered us through Christ, he cannot accept us: and when we do, that will qualify us for every other part of his worship.

In these texts, (you may turn to them in your prayer-books, and go through them along with me) we are plainly taught the nature of true penitence: that *the wicked must* both *turn away from his wickedness*, and *do that*, which the *law* enjoins as *right, to*

* Sacerdos, ante Orationem, Præfatione præmissa parat Fratrum, mentes. Cypr. de Orat. Dom. † Ecclus. xviii. 23.

save his soul alive: that we must not only *acknowledge our transgressions* with our tongues, but have them *ever before* the eyes of our minds, to keep us humble and cautious; on which we may pray, in faith of being heard, that God will treat us with the same kindness, as if he *hid his face from* seeing our *sins*, or *blotted* them *out* from his memory: that he requires from us, neither the fanciful *sacrifices* of superstition, nor the expensive ones of the Mosaic dispensation; but that of *a spirit contrite* with filial sorrow, and *broken* to universal obedience; not outward expressions of vehement passion, as *rending the garments*, but a *heart* rent and penetrated with a just sense of what we have done amiss: that on such a change within we shall find him, not only *slow to anger* for what is past, and *ready to repent him of the evil* which he was bringing upon us, but bountiful and gracious for the time to come; *though we have* deliberately *rebelled against him* heretofore, and still too often inconsiderately neglect to *obey his voice, and walk in his laws:* that we have cause to be willing, and even desirous, that he should *correct* us, when he sees it expedient; but to beg he would do it *with* that mild and merciful *judgment*, which he exercises towards his children, *not with anger*, as his enemies, which would *bring us* to final destruction; that repentance is absolutely and immediately necessary for us; for *the kingdom of Heaven is at hand;* the hour, when we shall, each of us, be admitted into it or excluded out of it for ever, draws very near, and how near we know not: that therefore we must resolve to *arise and go to our heavenly Father* without delay and acknowledge our unworthiness *to be called his sons:* that whatever we may be in our own eyes, or the opinion of our fellow-creatures, were we to un-

dergo a human trial only; yet if God *enter into judgment with us, in his sight shall no man living be justified:* that therefore to extenuate our faults, and *say* or imagine, *that we have no sin,* or but little, would be a fatal *self-deceit,* and a proof against us, that we know not, or, own not, the *truth* of our case: but if we honestly recall to ourselves and *confess* to God the errors of our past life; not only his mercy, but his *faithfulness and justice* to his promises will induce him both to *forgive us* the guilt of *our sins,* and *to cleanse us from* the defilement, and deliver us from the dominion, of *all unrighteousness.*

It is true, but few of the sentences are usually read at the same time: but it will be very beneficial for such as come soon enough, to meditate on them all before the service begins.

The first words of the exhortation, *Dearly beloved brethren,* express very strongly and properly the good will and tender regard, which the ministers of God's word should have for their people: who should in return receive their admonitions meekly and thankfully, since they *speak* to them *the truth in love* *.

A following part of the exhortation reminds us, that *although we ought at all times,* even in our private supplications, *humbly to acknowledge our sins before God; yet ought we most chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet together.* Our Saviour hath laid a peculiar stress on joint prayers; and made more especial promises to those petitions, which his Disciples put up in common †: both to unite them closely in mutual affection, by the mutual benefits they receive at each other's request; and to encourage a practice, which he foresaw would prove so powerful a means, both of their own edification, and

* Eph. iv. 15. † Matt. xviii. 20.

the conversion of others. We have reason therefore to entertain a much higher esteem, than many do, of the advantages to be obtained from constancy in public worship. But then, the more we expect from it, with the more care we must qualify ourselves for what we expect: else we shall certainly be disappointed. And as penitent confession in the name of Christ is the great qualification for pardon and every mercy; and each one's example, in the Church, of that or the contrary, must have a good or bad effect on those around him, we should endeavour, if there be room for any difference, to be more than ordinarily humble and fervent there: yet we are in danger of being least so, unless we look well to our ways, and diligently *keep our foot, when we go to the House of God* *.

In the next words, after these, the several main branches of worship, following confession, are expressed. And nearly the same order is observed in the service, as in the exhortation. *We render Thanks* to God *and set forth his Praise,* in the Psalms and Hymns; *hear his most holy Word,* in the Lessons; *and ask those things, which are requisite and necessary,* in the Prayers.

The conclusion of this preface, *Wherefore I pray and beseech you, to accompany me with a pure heart,* that is, a sincere one, *to the Throne of the heavenly Grace,* agrees intirely in sense, and partly in words, with that pathetic declaration of St. Paul: *as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God* †.

The *confession* is directed *to be said of the whole congregation, after the minister.* If this be done by each person, as is also directed, *with an humble voice,*

* Ecclus. v. 1. † 2 Cor. v. 20.

he will give no disturbance to others: and every one must experience, that what he saith, on this occasion, with his own mouth, is brought more home to his soul, becomes more personal and affecting, than if he had silently assented to it, when said for him. And as it is a very useful, so it is a very old custom *; revived in our church, after being laid aside by the Church of Rome; who begin their service with an act of humiliation by the priest alone, in which the people have no share.

Another direction is, that the confession be said, *all kneeling*. And that posture in prayer, especially in this part, hath not only ancient authority, but nature itself, on its side: and doth so strongly, both express and excite inward humility, that it should never be omitted wilfully, or negligently, in favour of ease and indolence: considerations, very unworthy of notice at such a time. Still they, whose infirmities will not permit them to be on their knees without pain or hurt, may doubtless allowably stand, or even sit: for God *will have mercy, and not sacrifice* †. And further: as in many full congregations this rule cannot be observed by every one, without taking up more room, than can with convenience be spared; certainly the superior rule, of doing *the things, wherewith one may edify another* ‡, binds us rather to be content with standing, though a less eligible posture, than exclude numbers of our fellow Christians from being tolerably accommodated for joining in worship with us. For kneeling, though greatly preferable, is not prescribed as indispensably necessary. *The children of Israel*, we read in the book of Nehemiah §, *were assembled with fasting*; and, probably for the reason just men-

* Basil, Ep. lxiii.
† Matt. ix. 13. xii. 7.
‡ Rom. xiv. 9.
§ Neh. ix. 1, 2.

tioned, *stood and confessed their sins.* The penite publican did not fail of being accepted, though *stood,* when he said, *God be merciful to me a sinner* And on some days the early Christians did not kn at all.

In the first words of the confession, we apply God, as our *Father:* the author of our being, therefore intitled to all honour and service from the adopter of us, after our forfeiture, into his fami again through Jesus Christ, and therefore intitled have it paid him with double gratitude. We acknow ledge him *Almighty,* either to protect or punish; therefore to be obeyed from interest, as well as du we acknowledge him to be *most merciful;* and the fore, in the highest degree, unfit to have been fended, and fit to have pardon asked of him.

The expression, *We have erred and strayed fro thy ways, like lost sheep,* is taken from Scripture. *have gone astray, like a lost sheep: seek thy servant* Again: *all we, like sheep, have gone astray; we ha turned every one to his own way: and the Lord ha laid on him,* on Christ, *the iniquity of us all* ‡. But understand the full propriety of the phrase, it mu be observed, that both the likelihood of straying wa much greater, and the consequences of it much mo fatal, in open countries, full of wild beasts, as tho of the East were, than in ours. And such *a gre and terrible wilderness* §, in the spiritual sense, is th world.

It hath been objected, that our confession is too ge neral. But it comprehends all sins, both of omissio and commission. The particulars, each person's co science, if it be duly tender, will represent to itsel

* Luke xviii. 13. † Psalm cxix. 176.
‡ Is. liii. 6. § Deut. i. 19.

as far as is needful, or well can be, in public. And was every sin, that men can fall into, expressed by name, the catalogue would be too long; and such, that many, (it is to be hoped) could not with truth join in the whole: nor would it be proper, that they who had, and had not, been guilty, should confess all the same things; or that those about us should perceive, which we did confess.

It hath been further objected, that in our appointed form, there is no acknowledgment of the original corruption of our nature by the fall. Nor is there an explicit one, even in the prayer of our blessed Lord. But surely when we say, that *we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts*, it may well be part of our meaning, that they are from the first irregular and depraved.

The words, *and there is no health in us*, besides that they also profess our inward frame throughout to be more or less disordered, signify too, that we have no power of our own, either to cure the spiritual diseases, of which we are already sick, or to prevent the attacks of future ones. And therefore we apply to God, that he would *heal our souls* *: whom also, in the conclusion, we implicitly promise, that whatever amendment shall be produced in us by the means which he prescribes, we will give the glory of it, not to ourselves, but to his holy name: *who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ to the praise and glory of his grace* †.

After the confession follows the absolution: which some have apprehended to be a very Popish form. But indeed neither of them is taken out of any Popish service. On the contrary, both of them appeared for the first time in the second edition of King Edward

* Psalm xli. 4. † Eph. i. 3. 6.

the sixth's Common Prayer-book: which was made with the advice of foreign, and even Presbyterian Protestants. Nay, this absolution was directly levelled against Popery. For the Popish absolutions were given in private, separately to each particular person, positively and without reversion, in the name of the priest: and this is given in public, to all persons at once, conditionally, if they are truly penitent, in the name of God. The people were misled by the former absolutions to a groundless trust in sacerdotal power: and would have taken offence, if after their confession none had been subjoined. This therefore was drawn up, to be used over them: which tends very powerfully to comfort men, but can never mislead them; because it leads them to trust only in God's mercy; and in that no otherwise, than if they *truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel,* proving their sincerity by their reformation: on which terms alone he hath *given his ministers power and commandment to pronounce to his people the absolution and remission of their sins.*

And as none, but his ministers, are commissioned to make this solemn proclamation of pardon on his behalf: it is fitly ordered, that none should share with them in publishing it, by repeating it along with them. And you will observe, that wherever in the service the congregation are not directed to speak, but the minister only, their speaking the same words low, as many persons inconsiderately do, removes only part of the impropriety, and leaves the rest. On this therefore, and the like occasions, you will remember, that your business is only to hearken and assent with silent reverence: of which reverence, in the present case, continuing on your knees, in token of your humble thankfulness to God, is undoubtedly a suitable expression.

After the above-mentioned declaration, immediately follows an admonition to *pray for repentance and God's holy Spirit:* which may seem perhaps needless and unaccountable; considering, that we have just been professing to exercise repentance, and have been assured of God's forgiveness upon it, of which the gift of his Spirit is a consequence. But if it be considered also, that we are to repent, not only before, but after pardon; and even the more deeply for the mercy and love shewn in our pardon, else it would be justly revoked: and that the continuance of God's Spirit with us depends on the continuance of our supplications for his presence, which will also procure us greater degrees of it; there will be found no weight in this objection.

At the end of the absolution, and of every prayer, the people are directed to say, *Amen:* which means, it is true; we do sincerely desire, or sincerely affirm, what hath been said. This was the practice of the Jewish Church: it was also that of the Christian in the Apostle's days. *How shall he, that occupieth the room of the unlearned, say Amen, at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not, what thou sayest* *? And the subsequent ecclesiastical writers shew, that it used to be pronounced audibly and fervently: each expressing his own faith or desire, and animating that of his fellow-worshippers. We should therefore by no means neglect to give this proof, amongst others, that we not only hear the service with attention, but join in it with earnestness.

After the confession and absolution, comes the Lord's Prayer: it being a very proper time to address God in that form, which our Saviour taught his Disciples, when we have approved ourselves his real

* 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

disciples, by repentance of sins, and faith in the Gospel-offers of mercy. And as he directs, *When ye pray, say, our Father, &c.* our liturgy accordingly directs, that every one should say it. For so they did in the primitive Church: in which it was called, the daily, the appointed, the public, the common prayer of Christians. Further: as our blessed Redeemer delivered it twice, and we see it in St. Matthew with the doxology, *For thine is the kingdom*, &c. and in St. Luke, without it; we sometimes use it one way, sometimes the other.

And now having presumed, in these solemn words, to claim God for our Father through Christ; for though his name is not mentioned in this prayer, it is to be understood by us in every article of it; we now proceed to vent the joy and thankfulness, belonging to such a privilege: which, I observed to you before, is the second part of our public service, as it was in the ancient Church; where, St. Basil informs us*, the people, after confession, rose from prayer and went on to psalmody. But to make the transition more natural and beneficial, we first beg, that God would permit and assist us, unworthy as we are, to pay him this homage. *O Lord, open thou our lips; and our mouth shall shew forth thy praise:* which are the words of David, in his chief penitential psalm, the fifty-first. Guilt had shut up his mouth from the utterance of cheerful sounds, till humiliation and assurance of pardon gave him that liberty of speech again, which, in his expressions, we pray it may give us. And some of the earliest liturgies used the same verse for the same purpose: as they did likewise that, which follows here, and which is found in two different psalms†, *O God, make speed to save us:*

* Ep. lxiii. † Ps. xl. 13. lxx. 1.

O Lord, make haste to help us: it being seasonable at all times to request, that as our danger is continual, he would be continually at hand, to *save* us from sin, and *help* us in our duty; especially when we are just advancing to so sublime a duty, and one which requires such purity of heart. *For praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner**, but *it becometh well the just to be thankful*†.

The way then being thus prepared, and having qualified ourselves with holy David to say, *My heart is ready, my heart is ready, I will sing and give praise*‡, we rise up from our knees, and stand upon our feet. For so we read, that when *the Priests and Levites praised the Lord, all Israel stood*§. And we begin this good work with that summary of all our praises, to which we shall often return in the course of them, and in which we shall conclude them: *Glory be* ascribed *to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning* of time *by* angels, *when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy*‖; as it hath been ever since, by religious persons in succeeding ages, according to the degree of their light; as it *is now*, by all the saints in earth and heaven, *and ever shall be*, not only throughout the present scene of things, by new Christians rising up in the place of those who die or fall away, (whatever men or devils may do to prevent it,) but after the final consummation, when all are united into one general assembly: whose triumphant acclamations to our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, shall resound *world without end*, duration without period, in that blessed state, which shall last to eternity.

* Ecclus. xv. 9. † Ps. xxxiii. 1. ‡ Ps. cviii. 1.
§ 2 Chron. vii. 6. ‖ Job xxxviii. 7.

And now having proposed the unspeakably great subject, that we are to celebrate, we invite each other to enter upon it more particularly: the minister saying, *Praise ye the Lord;* which is the literal translation of *Alleluiah,* so often repeated in the Old Testament, in the New, in the liturgies of the universal Church; and the people answering, with joyful approbation, *The Lord's name be praised.*

Some indeed of our dissenting brethren have thought, and so have some Papists*, that dividing this, and other parts of the service, as we do, between the priest and the congregation; and allowing the latter to make responses; (which means answers) is permitting, not only laymen, but even women, against an express prohibition of Scripture, to encroach on the ministerial office, makes a disagreeable confused noise, and hinders many from understanding what is said. But surely the office of the minister is sufficiently distinguished, as he presides and leads, throughout the service. And why should not the people be suffered to follow him; and bear some part with their voices in praying, as well as the main part in singing? Not to say, that the principal article, in which they do bear a part, is the Psalms for the day, which were designed to be sung, where it could be done conveniently, as I wish it could every where. No Scripture forbids the congregation to bear a part: that which forbids women to speak in the church†, means only to forbid their giving instruction, or entering into questions or disputations there. And St. Paul commands us to *speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*‡. Accordingly the primitive Christians are known to have used this

* See Bingham, l. xiv. c. i. §. 13.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 35.

‡ Eph. v. 19.

alternate manner in their public prayers and praises. And though, when the psalms and hymns are spoken thus, and not sung, there is nothing harmonious in the sound, yet St. John describes the worship of the blessed above by the *voice of many waters and of a great thunder* *: which is no unfit comparison for the united answers of a large congregation. As to the part of the objection, this method in reality creates no confusion or difficulty at all. A very little practice will render it easy to any one that can read: even they who cannot read, may join in it, by attending to those near them, or to the clerk: it makes a grateful variety, keeps attention awake, and enlivens devotion. In this manner then we glorify God: beginning always with the 95th Psalm, as the whole Christian Church did in early ages, and as the nature of the Psalm recommends to us: it being a distinct invitation to the several duties of praise, prayer, and hearing, with an awful warning of the danger of neglecting God, drawn from his judgments on the disobedient Jews, unto whom *these things happened for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition* †.

When we call him, in this Psalm, *the strength of our salvation;* we mean, that by his power alone we can be saved from the present and future evils. When we call him *a great King above all Gods;* we mean, above all that have ever had that name ascribed to them: the princes of the nations, the false deities of the heathen, Satan *the God of this world* ‡, and the holy angels in Heaven. When we say, that *in his hands are all the corners of the earth, and the strength of the hills is his also;* we mean, that his presence and his influence extend to the

* Rev. xiv. 2. † 1 Cor. x. 11. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

remotest and most inaccessible places; and there is none, where he cannot deliver or punish. When we call ourselves *the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand;* we own our Maker to be likewise our preserver, supporter and director; who feeds our souls by his word and his grace, as well as our bodies with daily bread, and guides us mercifully through this world to a better. *To-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,* is an affecting and alarming exhortation, that if we design ever to become his servants in earnest, we should hearken immediately to his continual calls; else through a habit of disobedience, our minds may grow callous, and *past feeling**. The words, *when your fathers tempted me,* which are put into the mouth of God himself, the Jews, (for whom first this Psalm was composed,) were to understand literally, of their fathers according to the flesh. But we are to take them of those, who have gone before us in the profession of religion: and whom we are not to resemble in *tempting and proving* God, that is, doubting, and putting to unreasonable trials, his omnipotence, his goodness and truth: lest, as the unbelieving Jews died in the wilderness, and so were excluded from the temporal rest, which otherwise they would have enjoyed in the land of Canaan, we also be excluded from what it prefigured, that eternal *rest,* which *remains for the people of God*† in Heaven.

At the end of this, and each Psalm that we repeat, of whatever nature it may be, we add the same doxology, that we used at first: glory being due to God, for every thing he hath taught, and every thing he hath done, both in former times and present; for every affliction, as well as every enjoyment. And

* Eph. iv. 19. † Heb. iv. 9.

therefore we do well to observe the Apostle's rule, of *giving thanks always, for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

Then we proceed to rehearse the Psalms, in proper portions, according to the days of the month: of which it will be needful to say much more, than there is now time to say. I shall therefore conclude with only remarking in general, that words of God's own inspiring are surely the fittest to praise him: in which being so noble a duty, we should take peculiar care to perform it in the most unexceptionable, judicious, and affectionate manner. *When you glorify the Lord, exalt him as much as you can; for even yet will he far exceed: and when you exalt him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for you can never go far enough*†.

* Eph. v. 20. † Ecclus. xliii. 30.

to the blessed Three in One is a fit conclusion to every Psalm.

But in reading them it must be carefully observed, and may with moderate care be commonly distinguished, in whose person the several sentences are spoken. In some psalms, or portion of psalms, it is God or Christ, in others, wicked men, that speak. These we must repeat, as their sayings; and none as our own, but what were intended for us. Even the words of the Psalmist, if we are to adopt them, may frequently seem so unapplicable to the outward condition, or inward frame, of many in every congregation, that, if they attend to them, they cannot say them with truth. But most of them all good people may say, even of themselves singly, with much truth. For they have constantly enemies, temporal or spiritual, afflictions more or less heavy, valuable mercies, and at times warm feelings of pious dispositions: which, if not present, may be so recalled, and made their own again, as to be very sincerely expressed to God. And what they cannot say in their own name separately, they may truly say in the name of Christ's Church, of which they are members: and they ought, and surely do, bear some share of the mercies and sufferings, the fears and desires of every part of it, in every state. And as David, in some of the Psalms, takes on him the person of Christ; in others he seems to take that of his Disciples: and to speak, not in any one particular character, but as representing the whole body of believers. Or if there be any passages, which neither of these methods will suit; still we may rehearse them, as expressing the case of some eminent worthy of old times, and be affected by it accordingly: for we often are strongly affected

by the circumstances, well described, not only of distant, but of imaginary persons. We may consider, as we go on, the likeness, or the difference, between his situation, his temper, and our own: and raise from it many reflections of sympathy and caution, of humiliation, encouragement, and thankfulness. Thus, at least, we may bring every thing we say, home to ourselves: and by so doing furnish our minds with a most valuable store of devout thoughts and language, perhaps for many future occasions of our own or others. For the book of Psalms is so inexhaustible a treasure of every branch of piety, that a more constant use of it, than of any other in the whole Bible, hath, with very just reason, been appointed in public forms of prayer, and recommended in private ones.

It may be objected, that in several of them David utters most bitter imprecations against his enemies; in which, to say nothing harsher, we cannot follow him: for the rule of the New Testament is, *Bless and curse not* *. But indeed most, if not all, the places, which appear wishes of evil, may, according to the confessed import of the original, be understood only as predictions of it. Or, supposing them wishes, David might be directed by infinite wisdom to pronounce them, even against the opposers of his reigning over Israel; who opposed, at the same time, the known decree of Providence. Repeating them in this view, solely as his, must be innocent: and strongly suggest an important admonition, *not to fight against God* †. But perhaps in some of these, as well as other passages, he speaks in the person of the whole Church of God, against all its irreconcileable adversaries, whoever they be. Such was Judas:

* Rom. xii. 14. † Acts xxiii. 9.

to whom therefore the two most dreadful of these Psalms are applied, Acts i. 20. And, with the utmost tenderness to the whole of God's creation, we may and must desire the overthrow of them, who obstinately hate him and his laws. For though we ought much more to desire the repentance, than the death of a sinner, as he himself doth: yet if they will not repent, we ought to think and speak with approbation and satisfaction, (yet mixed with an awful concern,) of their punishments here, and sentence hereafter: which last St. Paul represents good persons, as joining to pronounce: *Do ye not know that the Saints shall judge the world* * ?

It may be objected further, that however this be, the Psalms are unfit for our use on another account: they are full of Jewish notions and phrases. But they were composed by the aid of the Holy Spirit, with a view to Christian times: our Saviour appeals particularly to those things, *which are written in the Psalms concerning him* †, and they are many. Nor is the difficulty great, in applying the peculiarities of one dispensation to what answers them in the other: of understanding by the law, the doctrine of him, who came to fulfil it; by Jerusalem and Zion, the Christian Church; by the several sacrifices, that of our blessed Lord, or of our own prayers and praises offered up in his name; by the altar, the holy table; by temporal enemies and deliverances, spiritual ones; and so of the rest: thanking God, at the same time, that we have light afforded us, to see so much deeper into this and every Book of the Old Testament, than they who wrote it.

Still there may be more passages than a few in the Psalms, which many understand not. However, even

* 1 Cor. vi. 2. † Luke xxiv. 44.

these they may allowably read over, as undoubtedly they often do other things, in order and hope to understand them: and by reading with attention, they will come gradually to understand more and more of them. But if they would make this much easier to themselves, by reading carefully in private some paraphrase of the Psalms, if they are able to procure one, along with them: such as the larger of Dr. Hammond, or rather of Bishop Patrick, or the smaller of Dr. Nicols or Mr. Johnson. The particular passages, which one or other may find obscure to him, are too many to be explained from hence. But the darkest and least edifying in appearance will, by the use of any of these authors, be perceived, either to have some one determined sense of importance, or at least to be capable of several such.

And indeed all considerate Christians will acknowledge the excellence of the Psalter in a good translation. But some object against that, which we have in our Prayer-Books, as made in times of less learning and exactness, than the other in our Bibles: which, being more correct, they conceive ought to be used instead of it. But indeed, as the latter is, in some places, juster than the former; so is the former in some juster than that. And it hath one general ground of preference; that not rendering the words of the Hebrew so strictly, it gives the sense of them more intelligibly: notwithstanding that a few expressions, and but very few, are become in the space of 200 years, which have passed since it was made, less clear or proper, than they were at first. Indeed this old version hath here and there additions to what we now find in the original. But the only considerable one is taken from, if not warranted by, the New Testament: they are all harmless: they are

most of them founded on authorities not contemptible, particularly on that of the very ancient Latin interpreter, departing from which without necessity, would have given occasion of cavil to the Romanists. And as this translation in our Prayer-Books was made by martyrs and confessors for the Protestant religion, so it was with reason highly esteemed by the people; and soon grew, by often repeating it, so familiar to them, that changing it for another, though somewhat better on the whole, would have been disagreeable to them. Therefore the sense of both being sufficiently the same, (as any one, by comparing them, will be convinced;) the words, to which the congregation were accustomed, have been retained to this day.

It hath been objected farther, that, granting the use of this translation to be justifiable, yet the manner, in which we use it, is not. For we read it on, just as the Psalms lie: and thus we blend together those of joyful and those of sorrowful import, without distinction and without method; yet we cannot be supposed to vary our affections so quick, as this requires. But it should be remembered, that on the principal stated fasts and festivals, and on all occasional ones, Psalms proper to them are appointed out of the common course. On days indeed, which have nothing so particular in them, we follow the order in which they are set down. For we could not vary it, without omitting some of them, which none of them deserve; or disposing them in a way intirely new. Now what that should be, would be very hard to settle: and whatever was done, at least as many faults would be found then, as now. The present arrangement is certainly older than our Saviour's days: the public offices of the whole Christain Churches have

followed it from the very first account of them, that we have: and why should we make alterations, only to raise perplexities? The Psalms are indeed miscellaneous. But so are many other parts of Scripture. The Book of Proverbs is vastly more so. Yet no one objects against reading those, as they lie. In truth, scarce a chapter of the Bible, or any author whatever, can be read, but what calls for variety of dispositions and affections to be exercised, within a very small compass. Even in a short prayer is there not great variety, if it be well considered? In poetry and music, these transitions are often extremely abrupt and sudden, from one thing to its contrary in the highest degree. Yet the mind goes along with them very easily. Much more then may it do so when prepared, as in the present case, by a previous knowledge of what is to come next, and long practice in the change. And if repeating the Psalms in course be right; we have certainly fixed a right period of this course, that of a month: whereas the Church of Rome goes through them in a week, which is making one part of the service too long; and the Greek Church in twenty days, which is making it hard to find. On the whole then, let us but be careful, that our behaviour be as good in this branch of worship, as the regulation concerning it is: and notwithstanding the unhappy disadvantage of barely saying, what ought to be enlivened by the power of harmony; we may still, through God's grace, be warmed and filled with his Spirit, while we *speak to one another and ourselves*, as the Apostle directs, *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody*, if not with our voices yet *in our hearts, to the Lord* *.

After the Psalms, it hath long been customary for

* Eph. v. 19. Col. iii. 16.

the organ, where one is used, to play for a short time. And as instruments of music in divine service are certainly lawful (else they had not been appointed in the Jewish, or permitted in the ancient Christian Church *, or described in the Revelation as accompanying the praises of the blessed above;) so a little pause for the use of this instrument, will not only give some respite and refreshment to the congregation, and to the minister; but may be advantageously employed, either to reflect on what is past of the service, or prepare our minds for what is to come. And therefore it should not be filled up either by the performer with the lighter airs of music, instead of solemn strains, and such as may excite proper dispositions, or by any of the congregation with needless discourse, or such private thoughts and imaginations, as blot out good impressions already made, and indispose us for receiving the like afterwards.

In the next place follows a lesson, taken out of the Old Testament: and with this begins the third part of the office. That they, who are blessed with a Revelation from God, should read and hear it with reverence, when they assemble to worship him, is a plain dictate of reason and religion. Accordingly the Jews *read Moses and the Prophets in their synagogues of old time*, as the Book of Acts informs us †. And so indeed do writers of their own, in the same age with it ‡: who boast of the practice, as a most useful and honourable distiction, peculiar to their nation, that the laws of life were thus published to

* Ψαλμος εστιν ἡ δια του οργανου του μουσικου μελωδια. Greg. Nyss. Tract. 2. in Psalmos c. iii. §. 1. Ο ψαλμος λογος εστι μουσικος, ὁταν ευρυθμως κατα τους ἁρμονικους λογους προς το οργανον κρουηται. Basil in Ps. 29. Suic. in voc.

† Acts xiii. 27. xv. 21. ‡ Joseph. contr. Ap. l. 2. §. 18.

all the people. The primitive Christians, as one of the earliest apologists for them, Justin Martyr, tells us, read at their meeting, both the Jewish Prophets, and the writings of the Apostles, in proper portions. And when the Church of Rome had broken them into small fragments, interrupted with other things; and had continued to read even these in Latin, after it was no longer understood: our Church rectified both errors; and hath taken care, that the Old Testament should be gone through once a year, and the New thrice. Only we omit some parts of the former; which are repetitions of what is related in other parts, or bare lists of genealogies and families, or too mystical and abstruse to be edifying in public; on which last account we omit also the Book of Revelation, excepting two or three chapters: matters of such difficulty being wisely thought fitter for the private meditation and study of those, who are qualified to engage in them.

The order, in which the Books of both Testaments are read, is that, in which they stand. Only in the Old, the Prophet Isaiah, containing the fullest predictions of Christ's coming and kingdom, is placed at the approach of his nativity: and in the New, the Gospels and Acts are the lessons for the morning, and the Epistles for the afternoon. In this manner we make provision for every day in the year: and hence one great recommendation of daily attendance on public prayers, (where there are opportunities for it,) is, that by means of it we shall proceed regularly through the sacred writings, and preserve the due connection of the several discoveries, made in them to man. But for the first lessons on Sundays, those chapters of the Old Testament are selected, which appeared to be most useful. The second lessons

being from the New, there was no necessity, and little room, for choice. And to holidays such portions of both are adapted, as best agree with the occasion.

But here we are accused of setting mere human compositions on a level with the word of God, by taking part of our lessons out of the Apocrypha: which also we are charged with frequently binding up in the same volume with our Bibles. But so we sometimes do our Prayer-Books likewise: yet we never dreamed of equalling either to Scripture. The articles of our Church expressly distinguish the Apocrypha from it: the people of our Church know the distinction. And that it may not fail to be known, they are marked at the top of every page with the name, Apocrypha; which means, hidden; and, on whatever account it was given to these Books, belongs to them on this; that they are to be kept out of the way, and not produced as proof, when any point of doctrine or duty is in question; whereas the canonical Books are the canon or rule of faith and manners. The former therefore we read in the congregation, not as divine, but venerable for their antiquity, and the spirit of religion that breathes in them. Still some parts we pass over, as less useful: some, for the errors or improprieties, which they contain: and some others, we own, require candid interpretations. But there seems to be ground for one such interpretation, which will remove a good many objections at once: that some relations of things, which perhaps are not literally and historically true, possibly were never intended to be thought so; but written, like many other justly admired pieces, for admonitory fables or parables. That the doctrine of them in the main is excellent, and the narrations instructive, every one must own. They

were quoted with respect in the first ages of Christianity: they were read in public from very early ages: it would have given great and needless offence at the reformation to have left them out intirely: and they are never appointed for the Lord's day: by which means, it may be, there are many persons in every parish, who scarce ever heard an Apocryphal lessons in their lives. At least the second lessons are always canonical Scripture: of which a great deal more is read, besides the Psalms, (even in those Churches of ours, which have not week-day prayers,) than in any one congregation of the dissenters. And therefore they have no right to reproach us on the present head.

But supposing we should, any of us, apprehend, that this, or any thing else, in the service, mentioned or to be mentioned, might have been better ordered: yet we should always think of the judgment of others with proper deference, and of our own with modesty. And so long as nothing is required of us, contrary to our duty, we should remember, that our concern is much more to improve by every thing, than to object against every thing: by which last, unless done very discreetly, we may hinder, more than a little, our own edification, and that of others.

Let us therefore attend seriously to the lessons read: but with distinguished reverence to those of Scripture. We are admonished in the beginning of the office, that one great end, for which *we assemble and meet together*, is *to hear God's most holy word.* We pray in the conclusion of it, *that the words, which we have heard with our outward ears, may be inwardly grafted in our hearts.* Both these places mean, not the Sermon principally, but the Lessons, the Psalms, the Commandments, the Epistles, or the Gospels. The

discourses indeed, which we deliver to you from hence, we trust, are agreeable to God's word: and we desire you to judge of them by it. But Heaven forbid, that you should equal or prefer them to it: as you certainly appear to do, if you hearken to our sayings, and not to his. Think, I entreat you, then, whether you are not faulty in this respect: whether you do not often let your thoughts wander, without endeavouring to prevent it; whether you do not sometimes forget yourselves, and enter into talk with one another; while *God's most holy word* is reading to you. It is true, you can read it at home. But whether you do or not, he and your own consciences best know. Or if you do: so you can sermons too. And this would be an excuse equally, for not attending, or not regarding either of them. But still this is the place in which your Lord and Master hath commanded you to hear both: and hath promised to be *in the midst of you* *, and bless his ordinances to you, if you use them as you ought. And what then is your duty in such a case?

There are many things in the lessons perhaps, that you do not understand; many which, though you do understand them, yield you very little instruction or benefit. But attend to them diligently, weigh them deliberately, think how you may profit by them, consult proper persons, or books if you can, about them: and, by quick degrees, you will both apprehend your Bible better, and esteem it more; and reap such good from it as probably you never imagined. At least you will have done your utmost: and God will accept and reward you. I have given you directions at large, for the profitable reading of Scripture, which may be applied, in a great measure, to hearing it,

* Matth. xviii. 20.

and must not now be repeated. But the principal direction is, *Receive the seed of the word into an honest and good heart:* and you will certainly *bring forth fruit with patience,* unto everlasting life*. Say within yourselves at the beginning, with Samuel, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*†. Say of the more difficult parts, with David, *Open mine eyes, that I may see the wondrous things of thy law*‡. Say of those, that try your faith with the poor man in the Gospel, *Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief*§. Say of those, that direct your practice, with the people of Israel, *All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do*‖. And be assured of becoming, though not skilful in curious, which St. Paul stiles, *foolish and unlearned, questions*¶ and *doubtful disputations***; yet, what is infinitely better, humble and pious, and *wise unto salvation*††.

To each lesson succeeds a Hymn or Psalm: conformably to a decree of the council of Laodicea, 1400 years ago, that the public reading of God's Word should be mixed with repeating his praises: a most rational combination, as well as refreshing change.

The Hymn, called Te Deum, derives that name from the first words of it in the Latin: in which language it was composed, about the middle of the fourth century: and hath been used by the whole Western Church, at least 1200 years: in that of Rome, only on Sundays and holydays, and not all those, but in ours every day, as the singular excellence of it well deserves. It begins with equal majesty and simplicity: *We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.* And not we alone,

* Matth. xiii. 23. Luke viii. 15. † 1 Sam. iii. 10.
‡ Ps. cxix. 18. § Mark ix. 24. ‖ Exod. xix. 8.
¶ 2 Tim. ii. 23. ** Rom. xiv. 1. †† 2 Tim. iii. 15.

but *all the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting:* every corner of it having retained some apprehensions of a supreme Ruler; on which is founded that of St. Paul to the Athenians. *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you**. But unspeakably worthier honours, than those of poor mortals, are incessantly paid him in Heaven by the holy angels: mentioned in Scripture, and thence here, under the names of *Cherubim and Seraphim;* the former denoting probably their unwearied diligence to serve him, the latter their ardent love to him: whose acclamations therefore we humbly presume to adopt, as we find them recorded in that lofty description of the Prophet. *I saw the Lord, sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the Seraphim: and one cried unto another and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory*†. Where it must be observed, that for *God of Hosts* in the Prophet, is *God of Sabaoth* in the Hymn; the latter being the Hebrew word for the former: which both the Greek and Latin of the Old and New Testament having preserved, as comprehending more than could be well expressed by a single term of any other language; it is preserved in the English also, both here, and in two places of the Epistles‡. And it signifies God to be the sovereign Lord, of the *innumerable company of angels*§; of the host of Heaven, which the Heathen worshipped, the sun, moon, and stars; of the hosts and armies of all nations on earth; particularly the Jewish people, whom he led forth to battle; and lastly of the

* Acts xvii. 23.
† Is. vi. 1, 2, 3.
‡ Rom. ix. 29. James v. 4.
§ Heb. xii. 22.

Christian Church: which the Old Testament foretold should be *terrible, as an army with banners**; and the New describes, as furnished with *weapons of warfare, mighty, through God, to the casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of him, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*†. This therefore the phrase, *Lord God of Sabaoth,* means: not, as many imagine, (though it be a truth, but a very inferior one,) that God is peculiarly *Lord of the Sabbath*‡ day. For the words are intirely different in the original, though somewhat alike in our manner of writing them.

Nor are the praises of God sung in Heaven by the angels alone, but by *the spirits* also *of just men made perfect*§; particularly, as we go on to specify, *the* Apostles, Prophets, and Martyrs: with whom the *holy Church* yet militant *throughout the world* aspires to join in celebrating *the Father of an infinite majesty; his honourable, true, and only Son,* compared with whom, the highest of all created beings is unworthy of that name; *also the Holy Ghost the comforter* of every pious soul. Then returning to *the Captain of our Salvation*‖, we thankfully own, that *when he took upon him to deliver man* from sin and its punishment, *he did not abhor,* and disdain, as beneath him, the condescension of exchanging the glories of the Godhead *for the Virgin's womb;* and *when he had overcome the sharpness of death,* for us, by suffering it himself, (which alludes to the words, *O death, where is thy sting*¶*?) he opened the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.* Not that we mean to say,

* Cant. vi. 4. 10. † 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. ‡ Mark ii. 28. Luke vi. 5.
§ Heb. xii. 23. ‖ Heb. ii. 10. ¶ 1 Cor. xv. 55.

it was not open at all till then; whatever some ancient fathers may have held*: any more, than that *life and immortality* were not at all *brought to light before the Gospel* †. But as the light, which men had antecedently to our Saviour's coming, was augmented inexpressibly by it: so the kingdom of Heaven was set open vastly wider, in consequence of his sufferings, to receive believers, not from one people only, and their neighbours, but the whole globe. To him therefore, our Mediator now, *at the right hand of God*, and who *shall come to be our Judge*, we address our prayers, that as *we magnify him day by day*, (and let us take care to make good that assertion,) so he would keep us this and every *day without sin;* restrain us from offending through infirmity, as far as will be really for our inward benefit, but especially from wilful and presumptuous transgression; and that his *mercy* may *lighten*, that is, light or come, *upon us, as our trust is in him.*

Instead of the Te Deum, another Canticle, or song of praise, much ancienter, and even more anciently inserted into the offices of the Church, is allowed to be substituted: which from the first word of it in the Latin bears the name of Benedicite; and is taken from the Apocryphal part of the book of Daniel, where it is put into the mouth of those, who are commonly called the three children, or young men, whom *Nebuchadnezzar cast into the fiery furnace* ‡. It is now very seldom used, at least in parochial churches: but however contains a noble acknowledgement of the glory of God in his works of creation, the memorial of which was the original design of the Sabbath day;

* Iræn. Tert. Athanas. Hieron. Aug. Ambr. Basil. Greg. Thaum. Cyril. Hicros. & Alex. See Suicer in ψυχη.

† 2 Tim. i. 10. ‡ Dan. iii. 21.

and might be justly preferred to the former, whenever there is particular occasion to return thanks for the blessings of nature. An objection indeed hath been started, that in it we pray to the *angels and spirits of the righteous* to *bless the Lord.* And it might as well have been objected, that we pray to the *winds and fire, the frosts and snow,* to bless him. Plainly all this is no more than a figure of speech, though a very sublime one: lending as it were a tongue even to inanimate creatures, and calling both on those which do not, and those which cannot, hear us, to glorify our common Maker; just as is done in the 148th Psalm, of which this Canticle is an evident imitation.

After the second lesson, is appointed, either the prophecy of Zacharias in St. Luke, or the 100th Psalm: called for the reason which I mentioned before, Benedictus and Jubilate. The former was uttered on the birth of John the Baptist; and is a thanksgiving for the redemption of mankind, of which he was to publish the speedy approach. It copies very nearly the stile of the Jewish Prophets, who described spiritual blessings by temporal images. Thus, meaning to praise *the Father of mercies* * for delivering all nations from the dominion of the wicked one, it *blesses the Lord God of Israel, for saving his people from their enemies, and the hand of those that hate them.* Now this kind of language was laid aside after our Saviour's ascension: and therefore the prophecy before us is not of later date, but genuine. Yet it sufficiently explains, to what sort of *salvation* it refers: by mentioning the *remission of sins, the giving of light to them that sat in darkness, and guiding their feet into the way of peace.* And so it may teach us both the fitness and the method, of

* 2 Cor. i. 3.

assigning to the Old Testament predictions an evangelic interpretation. You will be sure, in repeating it, to remember, that the words, *And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest,* belong not to our Saviour, but the Baptist. And you will easily apprehend, that if in the dawning, which preceded the *sun of righteousness* *, good Zacharias offered up his thanks with such transport, we, to whom he shines out in full splendour, ought to recite it with double gratitude.

The 100th Psalm, which, being somewhat shorter, and the service long, we use the more frequently, is peculiarly proper after a lesson from the Gospel, since it peculiarly relates to the Gospel times: as appears from its inviting *all lands to be joyful in the Lord,* declaring them equally *God's people and the sheep of his pasture,* and calling on them equally *to go into his gates, and praise him for his mercy and truth.* And may we all accordingly so praise and serve him *in his courts* here below, that we may for ever *dwell in his tabernacle and rest on his holy hill* † above, through Jesus Christ our Lord, &c.

* Mal. iv. 2. † Psalm xv. 1.

SERMON XXVII.

1 COR. XIV. 15.

—I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

I HAVE hitherto explained and vindicated the daily service of our Church, as far as the Creed: which is placed between the third part of it, the lessons; and the fourth, the petitions: that we may express that faith in what we have heard, which is the ground of what we are about to ask. For as *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God* *: so we must *ask in faith,* if we *think to receive any thing of the Lord* †. For *how shall we call upon him, in whom we have not believed* ‡? But as all the doctrines of Scripture, though equally true, are not of equal importance; the more necessary articles have been, from the beginning of Christianity, collected into one body, called in Scripture, *the form of sound words* §, *the words of faith* ‖, *the principles of the doctrine of Christ* ¶: but in our common way of speaking at present the *Creed,* from the Latin word, *Credo,* which signifies *I believe.* Now the ancient Churches had many such Creeds: some longer, some shorter; differing on several heads in phrase, but agreeing in method and sense: of which, that called the *Apostles' Creed,* is one. And it deserves this name, not so much from any certainty, or great likelihood, that the

* Rom. x. 17. † James i. 6, 7. ‡ Rom. x. 14.
§ 2 Tim. i. 13. ‖ 1 Tim. iv. 6. ¶ Heb. vi. 1.

Apostles drew it up in these very expressions: (though some, pretty early, and many since, have imagined they did;) as because it contains the chief apostolic doctrines; and was used by a Church, which before it grew corrupt, was justly respected as the chief apostolic settlement; I mean, the Roman.

As *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*, so *with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* *: of which confession, repeating our Creed, though not a necessary, is a rational and commendable act. We do not indeed find it to have made part of the oldest public offices: but surely it is full as proper for these, as for private devotions; in which the primitive Christians all said it daily †. And as every one's profession of belief is his own separate act, so the Creed is worded for every one separately in the singular number: and therefore unless we say it along with the minister, he alone testifies his faith; not we, ours. Nor should it by any means be with negligence and indifference, that we profess our faith. For what we believe is the only just foundation of what we do, or hope, or fear. On this account we stand at the repeating of the Creed: to express our stedfastness in it; and our readiness to *contend earnestly*, in every proper method, *for the faith, once delivered to the saints* ‡. Turning, at the same time towards the east, as many do, is an ancient custom; as indeed, in most religions, men have directed their worship some particular way. And this practice being intended only to honour Christ, the sun of righteousness, who hath

* Rom. x. 10.

† Symbolum quoque specialiter debemus, antelucanis Horis quotidie recensere. Ambros. de Virg. l. 3. p. 115. ap. *Bingh.* l. 10. c. 4. §. 17. Quis non quotidie recitat, ore, Credo, &c. Lib. de duplici Martyrio, Cypriano, falso ascript, in fine.

‡ Jude ver. 3.

risen upon us, to enlighten us with that doctrine of salvation; to which we then declare our adherence; it ought not to be condemned, as superstition: and yet, being neither obligatory in itself, nor commanded by authority, the omission of it ought not to be censured as irreverence or disobedience.

Another thing, yet more usual in saying the Creed, is to bow, when the name of *Jesus* is mentioned. And some have thought that to be their duty, whenever it is mentioned, at least in divine service: because they find in their Bibles the words, *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow* *. But this is no ancient notion: and the generality of judicious commentators allow it not to be the meaning of the place: a more exact translation of which would be, *that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow*, that is, every one should pray: according to that other passage of St. Paul, *I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you, &c* †. However, it is a practice of some antiquity; and whatever a few over-scrupulous people have imagined, surely a harmless one: for nobody means to worship the sound; but the person, whom it denotes. And though we confess, there is no more reason to worship the Son of God, by bowing to him, than the Father; nor to worship him, on hearing the name, Jesus, than the name, Christ: yet it is not good to be *contentious* about an innocent *custom* ‡; which also may help attention, and increase devotion. Besides, it is authorized by the 18th canon of our Church, which directs, that *when, in time of divine service the Lord Jesus shall be mentioned, due and lowly reverence shall be done by all persons present, as it hath been accustomed.* Possibly these last words may

* Phil. ii. 10. † Eph. iii. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 16.

be designed to intimate, that fear of giving offence by leaving off the custom was a principal motive to the injunction. And if so, in proportion as that danger abates, the injunction grows less important. Accordingly they, who are intrusted with the execution of the canons, have not lately, if ever, inforced it, or laid stress upon it. And indeed, as the greater part of most congregations disregard it, except in the Creed, they ought not to judge hardly of those, who omit it then also: however proper they may think it, for themselves, to distinguish that part of their belief, which peculiarly belongs to them as Christians, from the preceding, by this gesture.

Having explained the Apostles' Creed at large, in several lectures on the Catechism, I shall add nothing more concerning it here. But there will be need to take some notice of another, appointed to be rehearsed in its stead, on the principal festivals, and several other holidays, and called the Creed of St. Athanasius: not that he was the author of it, though it was probably made pretty near, if not in his time, who lived 1400 years ago; but because it expresses that faith in the Trinity, of which he was a principal defender. And as the Romanists threw on the reformers of our Church all manner of calumnies, that they could, so it would have given them a great handle against us, had this Creed, which they repeat every Sunday, been rejected or altered by us.

Many indeed have argued against the use of it; and some, with strange vehemence: partly from the doctrines, which it teaches; but chiefly from the condemnation, which it pronounces on all, who disbelieve them. Now the doctrines are undeniably the same with those, that are contained in the Articles of our Church, in the beginning of our Litany, in the

conclusion of many of our Collects, in the Nicene Creed, and, as we conceive, in that of the Apostles, in the Doxology, in the Form of Baptism, in numerous passages of both Testaments: only here they are somewhat more distinctly set forth, to prevent equivocations. Any one, who examines into the matter, will easily see it to be so. Accordingly our dissenting brethren, after they had long objected to other parts of our liturgy, consented readily to subscribe this Creed: the articles of which are the common faith of the Catholic Church, or by immediate consequence deducible from it; and little or nothing more. There are indeed several things in them, beyond our comprehension as to the manner: but the Scripture hath the same. There are expressions, which may seem liable to exception: but it must be for want of understanding them, or admitting fair interpretations of them. The assertion, that *there is one Father, not three Fathers,* and so on, may appear to the ignorant, needless, and trifling: but was levelled against heresies, then in being, which took away all distinction, between the three Persons. That *none is before or after other,* means, (as the following words, *but the whole three Persons are coeternal,* prove,) that none is so in point of time, not that none is so in the order of our conceptions: for the Scripture directs us to consider the Father, as first. That *none is greater or less than another,* is reconciled to our Saviour's assertion, *the Father is greater than I**, by what follows in the Creed, *equal as touching his Godhead, inferior as touching his manhood.* That he is *one, altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person,* means, (for so the next words explain it,) that as each of us is one man, not at all by

* John xiv. 28.

blending the soul and body into one substance, for they are still distinct, but *altogether*, by a mysterious union of the two: so he is one Christ, not at all by blending the divine and human nature into one substance, but altogether, intirely and solely by an union of them, yet more mysterious than the former is.

The condemnation contained in two or three clauses of this Creed, belongs, (as the most zealous defenders of our faith in the holy Trinity agree, and as every one, who reads it considerately, will soon perceive,) not to all, who cannot understand, or cannot approve, every expression in it; but only to such as deny in general *the Trinity in Unity*, or three Persons who are one God. *This* alone is said to be *the Catholic faith*. The words, that follow after, *for there is one person of the Father*, and so on, are designed only to set this forth more particularly. And the conclusion from the whole is, not that *in all things*, which are *aforesaid*, by the use of every term abovementioned, but *in all things*, AS IS *aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped:* meaning, that as at first it was said, that in all acts of faith we are to believe in each Person, so here it is added, that in all acts of worship we are to adore each: never considering one, even while addressed distinctly, as separated or separable from the other two. Now this Trinity in Unity we apprehend to have been, ever since it was fully revealed, a fundamental article of the Christian faith. And yet those, who believe not even so much, the Creed no otherwise teaches *cannot be saved*, or *shall without doubt perish*, than as our Saviour teaches concerning the whole of the Gospel: *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved: but he, that believeth not, shall be damned* *. Our condemnation

* Mark xvi. 16.

is no more hard and uncharitable, than his. And neither is so: because both are to be interpreted with due exceptions and abatements. Suppose a collection of Christian duties had been drawn up; and it had been said, in the beginning or at the end of it, *this is the Catholic* practice, *which except a man* observe *faithfully, he cannot be saved:* would not every one understand, that allowance must be made for such things, as a man through involuntary ignorance mistook, or through mere infirmity failed in, or was truly sorry for, as far as he knew he had cause? Why then are not the same allowances to be understood, in speaking of doctrines? For when the Creed says, that *whoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith;* it doth not mean, that true faith is more *necessary,* than right practice: but that naturally it precedes it, and is to be first learnt in order to it. The intention therefore of the Creed, as well as of our Lord in the Gospel, is only to say, that whoever rejects the doctrine of it, from presumptuous self-opinion, or wilful negligence; and doth not afterwards repent of these faults; particularly, if he is made sensible of them; or if not, at least in general, amongst his unknown sins; the case of such a one is desperate. But if want of information, weakness of apprehension, or even excusable wrongness of disposition, should make him doubt or disbelieve any or the main part of this Creed; nay, which is vastly a worse case, the whole revelation of Christianity: though we pass judgment on his errors without reserve; and, in general, on all, who maintain them; yet personally and singly we presume not to judge of his condition in the next world. *To his own master he standeth or*

*falleth**. Much less would we think unfavourably of any one, who takes these condemning clauses in too rigourous a sense, and therefore only is afraid, from a spirit of charity and humility, to join in them. Indeed for the sake of such, it may seem pity, but either they had been originally omitted; (since though defensible, they are not necessary to be inserted in a profession of faith;) or the limitations, with which they are to be understood, had been signified in two or three comprehensive words.

After our Creed, we go on to our petitions. In these, the minister and people first recommend each other to our blessed Redeemer, in terms of Scripture, which a council, held near 1200 years ago †, affirms to be used for this purpose by the direction of the Apostles, and may certainly well be used so without it: *The Lord be with you* ‡: *And with thy Spirit* §. Then we make a direct application to him, under the names of *Lord* and *Christ*, repeating it thrice, as a mark of our earnestness, that he would *have mercy upon us:* words often addressed to him, when on earth; often solemnly reiterated by the whole ancient Church, and spoken by the Latin Church in the original Greek of the New Testament, Κυριε ελεησον ‖, but much more prudently translated by ours into English.

This done, as before we subjoined the Lord's Prayer to our Confession, to obtain the confirmation of our pardon; so now we prefix it to our requests, as a summary of our desires. And surely saying it again at such a distance, and with so different a view, cannot be thought a *vain repetition* ¶.

* Rom. xiv. 4. † Conc. Bracarense 1. A.D. 563. Can. xxi.
‡ 2 Thess. iii. 16. § 2 Tim. iv. 22. ‖ Matth. xv. 22. xx. 30, 31.
¶ Matth. vi. 7.

After these general prayers, we express to God distinctly, in short sentences, the several heads of the supplications, which we are about to offer up more at large, for peace, and grace, for the king, the clergy, and the people. And all these sentences are conceived in words taken from the Psalms: excepting one, *Give peace in our time, O Lord;* which hath a reason added to it, by some thought improper; *Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God:* whereas, say they, we often have others to fight for us; and if we had him alone, why should we despond, and immediately pray for peace upon it? But these objectors utterly mistake our meaning: which is, that whatever help we have besides, we look upon it as nothing, without that of the Almighty; whom therefore we beg, in the words which they unjustly blame, when we are in peace, to continue it, by restraining such as would disturb it; and when we are not, to restore it, by turning the hearts or overthrowing the attempts, of those who have infringed it.

In consequence of these preparations, the petitions themselves follow: not in one long prayer, but several short ones; which method is certainly as lawful as the other; and, we think, more expedient. It reminds us oftener of the attributes of God, and merits of Christ, which are the ground of our *asking in faith* *: and by the frequency of saying, *Amen,* it stirs up our attention, and warms our devotion, which are too apt to languish. These short prayers have the name of Collects: either from their collecting much good matter, particularly out of Scripture, into a small compass; or from their being originally composed for the people to use, when collected and

* James i. 6.

assembled together. And the first of these Collects is, that for the day. Besides the Lord's day, which is the weekly memorial of all God's goodness to us, and our duty to him, we have annual ones, to celebrate, not only the principal parts of the history of Christ, but also the holy lives and deaths of his chief followers, who are mentioned in the New Testament. For, as *the righteous* are to *be had in everlasting remembrance* * ; and the Epistle to the Hebrews particularly directed the first Christians to *remember them, which had had the rule over them, who had spoken unto them the word of God* † : as they did accordingly pay distinguished honours to the memories of the Apostles, Evangelists and Martyrs: and as the Church of Rome, which had gone much too far in this matter, would notwithstanding have had a great advantage against us, if we had neglected it intirely; we do therefore, on the days, which bear their names, read portions of Holy Writ relating to them, return thanks to God for their labour and example: and beg, that we may profit suitably by them. This then makes a considerable proportion of the variable Collects. The rest are appointed, one for each Sunday and week in the year. And the intention, however imperfectly executed, must have been, that sometimes praying more explicitly for this grace or mercy, sometimes for that, we may be likelier to obtain, through God's goodness, all that are needful for us.

The objection, that our service is taken from the Popish, affects chiefly the Collects. But those of ours, which are the same with theirs, are mostly derived from prayer-books, brought over in the days of that Pope, by whose means our Saxon ancestors were converted to Christianity, above 1100 years ago:

* Ps. cxii. 6. † Heb. xiii. 7.

and they were old ones then; much older, than the main errors of Popery. However, partly at, and partly since, the Reformation, such of the Collects in those books, as wanted and deserved it, have been carefully corrected: many, that were thought improper, quite removed: and new ones framed in their stead. But why should those be changed, which are both faultless in themselves, and recommended by venerable antiquity?

After the Collect for the day, come two constant ones, to be used every day, *for peace and grace:* general words, comprehending between them all blessings, temporal and spiritual. In the former, which is translated from the ancient Latin offices, we beseech God, *in the knowledge of whom standeth our* hope of *eternal life* hereafter, and *whose service,* in proportion as we improve in it, gives us here *perfect freedom* from the tyranny of sin, and the stings of an evil conscience, would likewise so *defend us in all assaults of our* outward *enemies, that trusting in* Him, *we may not fear* them. Thus we embolden ourselves from the consideration of his greater mercies, to hope for the lesser: In imitation of the Apostle's reasoning, *he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things**? The latter of these Collects is not taken from the Roman, but principally from the Greek service, as others of our prayers besides are: the compilers of our liturgy prudently extracting, from both, what was proper to inrich and add authority to the work, in which they were engaged. And it begs that protection of God more especially for the present day, which the former begs in general: but above all, *that we may fall into no*

* Rom. viii. 32.

sin even undesignedly, much less *run into any kind of danger* of it wilfully, but *do always what is righteous in his sight.*

After these Collects, follows, on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the Litany. But I shall speak of that hereafter, God willing; and proceed now with the stated service of the other days of the week: in which, having put up the before-mentioned prayers for ourselves, we begin our intercessions for other persons: and first for the *King, as supreme**: in obedience to the Apostle's injunctions†, and in imitation of the primitive Christians, even while they lived under Heathen emperors. The duties of that station being very important and difficult, and the hazards of erring and sinning in it many and great, we therefore pray Him, who is *the only Ruler* of the heart and conduct *of Princes,* and *beholds* the state of *all the dwellers* in their dominions every where *on earth, to replenish our Sovereign,* both *with the graces and the gifts,* needful for him: *to grant him long to live in health and wealth;* that is, prosperity; as we pray God, in the Litany, *to deliver us in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth; to strengthen him, that he may overcome all his enemies,* all that wish ill to him or his people; and finally to bestow on him *everlasting felicity.*

Then, because the royal family are the future hopes of the public, and in the mean while their whole behaviour is of very great consequence to it: we apply more distinctly than the ancient church did, but surely with reason, to *the fountain of all goodness,* who therefore is able to supply the branches, as well as the root, for such blessings on every branch,

* 1 Pet. ii. 13. † 1 Tim. ii. 1.

especially the principal by name, as their condition requires.

After this, we pray for the whole clergy and people of our land: that he, *who alone worketh great marvels;* who hath in all ages marvellously protected his Church against the Devil and wicked men; who endued his Apostles with marvellous and miraculous gifts on the day of Pentecost, and by their means many others; who doth and ever will produce marvellous effects on the hearts of believers by the ministry of his word and sacraments, and who only can do such things; would *send down the healthful,* that is the healing, strengthening, and saving, *spirit of his grace, on all bishops and curates;* persons, to whom the cure or care of souls is entrusted; for this the word *curate,* signifies throughout the Prayer Book, not merely those ministers who assist the proper incumbent; and likewise on *all congregations committed to their charge.* And we further beseech him not only to bestow on them at first good dispositions; but *(that they may truly* and lastingly *please him) pour upon them his continual blessing,* like a kindly *dew* descending from above. *For neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God, that giveth the increase**.

Next to this, *in the time of war,* we address ourselves to the *Almighty Governor of all things,* whose *justice in punishing* us *sinners* with this evil we acknowledge, and whose *mercy* to deliver us from it, on our *true repentance,* we hope for, and cannot hope for it else: complaining of the *pride* and *malice of our enemies;* of which they must be guilty, if the war on our side be lawful, otherwise there would be

* 1 Cor. iii. 7.

peace: and in the genuine spirit of Christianity intreating, that the one may be *abated*, the other *assuaged;* which is praying for them as well as ourselves. And till they suffer their dispositions to be mended, we beg that their *devices* and enterprizes may be *confounded:* which word, as dreadful as it sounds too often in passionate common speech, means here no more than disappointed: and this is the worst we wish, even to those *who hate us and despitefully use us**.

There is also appointed a very fit *prayer to be read during the Session of Parliament,* for a blessing on their consultations. But here it may be asked, how the compilers of it could venture to call in it every one of our kings, in all time to come, *most religious.* Now certainly they did not intend to prophesy, that, in the common meaning of the word, they always would be so: nor yet to require, that we should call them so in a sense, that was not true. And therefore they must either mean by *religious,* (what it sometimes means in the language, from which it is derived,) the object of most awful regard, sacred, a title frequently ascribed to Kings: or indeed rather, *most religious* must be understood in the same manner, as the next word to it, *gracious,* constantly is, without the least difficulty or scruple, both in the liturgy and out of it; and as the titles *most Christian,* and *most Catholic* are; to denote the good qualities, which princes profess, and should have; and therefore their subjects are willing and ought to hope they have; and by reminding them, endeavour that they may have. Accordingly this very epithet, *most religious,* was constantly ascribed to all successive emperors in St. Chrysostom's and St. Basil's liturgies, the common

* Mat. v. 44.

ones of the Greek Church, as it is to all successive kings in ours. The intention being thus cleared, the lawfulness of joining in the expression is evident. In the prudence of chusing it originally we are less concerned. Yet in defence of that we may plead, that this prayer was composed and originally used in the reign of a prince, acknowledged to be unfeignedly religious, king Charles the first *. And whatever scruples have been raised concerning the propriety of this part of it in some reigns since, happily there is no room for them in the present.

After these particular intercessions, we add a general one for all mankind, especially for all Christians, and most especially for all that are in affliction: to which we subjoin as general a thanksgiving for all God's mercies to us and them; but above all, for that, which gives us a claim to eternal happiness. Neither of these forms is taken from any other liturgy: both are excellent: and every one, who desires it, may, by signifying that desire, have a separate share in either. This provision is a very useful and comfortable one: and we exhort you, on all fit occasions, to take the advantage of it. Only we must beg, that they, who have received benefit by being prayed for, will not forget to return thanks; but conscientiously avoid our Saviour's reproof: *were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine* †?

The general Thanksgiving may perhaps to some appear superfluous, after we have thanked and praised God in the use of the Psalms and Hymns. But it was inserted at the Restoration, because others complained it was wanting. And indeed it is a more methodical summary of the several mercies of God *to us and to all men,* than we had before: it furnishes an oppor-

* See Wilkins Conc. Vol. iv. p. 539. † Luke xvii. 17.

tunity of thanking him more expressly for the late instances of his *loving kindness* to the members of our own congregation: and besides, as we cannot be too thankful to God; the acknowledgments, which we offered up in the beginning of the service, are very properly repeated in the end. For surely we ought to ask nothing of God, without remembering, what we have received from him: which naturally excites both our faith and resignation: and prepares the way for that admirable Collect, with which we conclude.

It is taken from the middle of St. Chrysostom's liturgy: but much more judiciously placed in the close of ours. It first thankfully confesses the great goodness of our blessed Redeemer, in disposing our minds, of themselves so variously and wrongly inclined, to ask unanimously of him such things as we ought, and encouraging our applications by such explicit assurances of hearing us. Then it submits entirely to his wisdom, in what manner, and how far, he will think it for our good to grant us any of our particular requests: begging nothing absolutely, but what he hath absolutely engaged to bestow on our prayers and endeavours; *viz.* that practical *knowledge* here *of his truth,* his doctrines and his precepts, his promises and threatnings, that hereafter we may attain *everlasting life* and happiness.

These things done, it can only remain, that on departing from God's more immediate presence in his Church, we intreat for ourselves and one another, (as we do accordingly in the words of Scripture †,) the continual presence of the Holy Trinity, whereever we go: that *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,* which will secure us *the love of God* the Father, and *the fellowship,* that is, the communication of

* 2 Cor. xviii. 14.

the needful warnings and assistances *of the Holy Ghost.*

Now *what we* thus *faithfully ask, may we effectually obtain, to the relief of our necessity, and the setting forth of God's glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

SERMON XXVIII.

1 COR. XIV. 15.

—*I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

THE liturgy of our Church has now been explained to you, as far as the end of the Morning Prayer. The Evening Prayer hath nothing different from it; excepting the Hymns, that follow the Lessons, and the two Collects after that for the day.

The Hymn after the first Lesson, called Magnificat, from the word, with which it begins in the Latin, was used anciently by the Western Church; and continues to be used by the Protestants abroad. It is the song of the blessed Virgin, recorded by St. Luke *, on the confirmation which she received, at Elizabeth's house, of what the angel had told her, that she should become the mother of our Lord, by the operation of the Holy Ghost: and it expresses most naturally the transport, which on that occasion she must feel; but, like the Hymn of Zacharias, in phrases of the Old Testament, to be interpreted from the New: of which matter I have already spoken.

My soul doth magnify the Lord, doth acknowledge the infinite greatness of his power and mercy: *for he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden;* that is, the *low estate;* for so the original

* Luke i. 46—55.

signifies, and so it is expressed in our bibles; not the humility of mind, which the Holy Virgin was too humble to ascribe to herself. *From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed:* as we do accordingly, both by repeating this Hymn, and in our common speech. *For he, that is mighty, hath magnified me,* hath raised me to great honour: *and holy is his name;* his truth, his justice, his mercy, his concern for the goodness as well as happiness of his creatures, are gloriously manifested in this wonderful dispensation. *He hath shewed* in times past, and will as certainly now, as if it were done already, *strength with his arm,* supernatural deeds performed by his power, for the erection of the kingdom of his Son: and hath often, and will again, *scatter,* and defeat *the proud* opposers of it, by means of those very *imaginations of their hearts,* in which they exult. *The mighty* amongst the Jews and Heathen *shall be put down from their seat, and humble and meek* Christians *exalted* in their stead. *They that hunger and thirst after righteousness* *, shall be *filled with* spiritual *good things; and the rich,* that rely on the vain and false treasures of their own wisdom and merit, he will convict of being *poor and blind and naked* †, *and* so *send* them *empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel,* all that by obeying him become his people, *as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham* the father of the faithful, *and his* true *seed;* thus *remembering his* covenanted *mercy,* which shall last *for ever.* This is the triumph of the holy Virgin: and every part of it should be our own likewise. For God *hath regarded our low estate,* together with her's, and *magnified* us, and made us *blessed.* And we should magnify and bless him continually for it.

* Matt. v. 6. † Rev. iii. 17.

Instead of this hymn, our Prayer Book tells us, may be used, and in some places it frequently is, the 98th Psalm: in which we exhort one another to *sing unto the Lord a new song;* words, denoting, in the book of Revelation *, Gospel praises: and we foretel that *all lands* shall join in it, *with trumpets and shawms,* another instrument of wind-music, which in our Bible is called a cornet: whence we may conclude, if it needed proof, that musical instruments are lawful in Christian worship. This future time of universal thanksgiving is described to be, when God shall *remember,* that is, shall give evidence that he hath never forgot, *his mercy and truth towards the house of Israel,* according to the flesh; and not only they, but *all the ends of the world shall see his salvation.* No wonder, that even the irrational and inanimate parts of nature are called upon by a lofty figure of speech, to celebrate that glorious day: *the sea* to *make a noise, and all that therein is; the floods* to *clap their hands, and the hills to be joyful together before the Lord:* partly for the present happiness of that period, in which possibly the lowest of God's works may share; but chiefly for the approach of the next and concluding scene of Providence, when he shall *come* finally, *with righteousness to judge the world, and the people with equity.*

After the second lesson, is appointed another hymn, used by the ancient Church, in their private devotions at least; and by the present Greek and foreign reformed, as well as ours and the Romish, in their public ones; and called from the Latin beginning of it, *Nunc dimittis.* It expresses the gratitude of good old Simeon, *a just man and devout,* as we read in St. Luke †, *and waiting for the consolation of Israel;*

* Rev. v. 9. xiv. 3. † Luke ii. 25—32.

teously; shall govern and reward the people of the world, (for so the word, *folk*, signifies, and was not a low expression formerly,) by the equitable and merciful rules of Christianity. For *then*, on our doing this, *the earth shall bring forth her increase* more plentifully; *and God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing*, temporal and spiritual: *for godliness hath promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come* *.

The former of the two Collects, peculiar to Evening Prayers, is taken from a Latin form, at least 1100 years old. It begs for the greatest of blessings here below, that joyful peace of mind, which our Saviour promised his Disciples: *Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you* †. And since it cannot be obtained, but by *holy desires, good* and prudent *counsels* for the execution of them, *and just actions*, done in consequence of both; so we petition him, *from whom all* these *proceed*, to grant it us by means of them: that *our hearts being set* by his grace *to keep his commandments*, and our ways *defended* by his Providence *from the fear of our enemies*, we may find *the work of righteousness, peace; and its effect, quietness and assurance for ever* ‡.

The latter Collect, taken in part from an office of the Greek Church, prays more particularly for the safety of the ensuing night: that God's favour may shine upon us, and *lighten our darkness*; that is, protect us, while we are unable to help ourselves, or even to know our danger. The same phrase is twice used in the book of Psalms. *Unto the godly there ariseth up light in darkness* §. And again, *the Lord shall make my darkness to be light* ‖.

* 1 Tim. iv. 8. † John xiv. 27. ‡ Is. xxxii. 17.
§ Psalm cxii. 4. ‖ Psalm xviii. 28.

happen, that during one assembly of theirs, different ministers praying successively, or the same minister in several prayers, or perhaps in one only, shall fall into as many repetitions, as are in the different parts of our Liturgy, or more? But be that as it will, to these last all persons would easily be reconciled, if an interval were placed, in their minds at least, between the services; and they would consider each, when it begins, as a new and independent one, just as if it were a fresh time of meeting together.

The Litany of our church is not quite the same with any other; but differs very little from those of the Lutherans in Germany and Denmark. It is larger than the Greek; but shorter than the Roman, which is half filled up with the names of saints invoked: whereas we invoke, first the three persons of the holy Trinity, separately and jointly: then in a more particular manner our Redeemer and Mediator, *to whom all power is given in heaven and earth* *.

Him we pray, that he would *not remember our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers:* which he may not only with justice permit to intercept from us (as they naturally often will) the blessings, that we might else have inherited: but, if we have imitated wicked ancestors, instead of taking warning by them, he may with equal justice punish us more severely, not indeed than we deserve, but than he would have done otherwise, to prevent the contagion from growing general and inveterate. Accordingly the second commandment threatens to *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children:* and the Psalmist, according to the marginal, and perhaps righter translation, prays as we do: *O remember not against us the iniquities of them, that were before us* †.

* Matth. xxviii. 18.

† Psalm lxxix. 8.

duce: whether they be temporal, as *battle and murder;* or spiritual, as *false doctrine,* with its fruits, *heresy and schism;* and what begets them all, *hardness of heart* in regard to God's commands, and *contempt of his word,* which contempt was never so widely spread and infectious, as at present.

We have indeed been blamed for praying against *sudden death.* But the whole Christian Church hath done it from ancient time: and nature and reason, as well as religion, direct us to do it. Some, we own, (and we wish they were many,) may be always prepared thoroughly, in all respects, to die at any time. Yet even these may have cause to wish for warning of their death on account of other persons. Their example under the approach of it will usually be very instructive; and their dying advice more than ordinarily beneficial to their friends, dependents and relations: whom also their being taken away at once may shock, to a degree, for which they would be extremely sorry, whatever they might otherwise chuse for themselves. But, even on their own account, Christian humility would surely desire a little space for completer preparation. And they, who profess to wish the contrary, are they so very certain, as this implies, that every part, both of their worldly affairs and their eternal concerns, is in the best condition, to which it can be brought? Or may not possibly this appearing readiness to die at any time arise, either from a secret dread to think of dying at all, or a secret unbelief, more or less, of what will follow after death? But whatever a few may imagine best for themselves, justly or unjustly; some previous notice is undeniably best for the generality: and common prayers must be adapted to common cases;

Having thus represented our own necessities, we now enlarge the subject of our devotions; and *make supplications* as the Apostle *exhorts, for all men* *: acknowledging, that we are *sinners*, and therefore unworthy, yet sensible that we are bound by his commands, and encouraged by his promises, to offer up such requests. And here, after praying in general for the Catholic Church, we pray in particular for the head and principal members, both spiritual and temporal, of that part of it, to which we belong, and for the whole of God's people of this land: then we extend our views further yet; and apply for blessings, religious and civil, to all other nations in common with our own; and to all sorts of persons amongst them and ourselves, according to their respective distresses and wants, of soul, body or outward circumstances: and lastly conclude our intercessions with imploring God's *mercy upon all men*, whatever their country, their religion, their sins may be; but especially *on our enemies, persecutors and slanderers*, whom we beg he would *forgive*, and in order to it, *turn their hearts* to a righter disposition.

Against some of our requests for others, objections have been made. One is, that in beseeching God *to succour, help, and comfort all that are in danger*, we beseech him to assist malefactors in escaping justice. But doth not every one understand it of such *help and comfort*, as their case admits, consistently with common good? Another is, that in praying him *to preserve all that travel by land or by water*, we pray for the preservation of robbers and pirates. But surely our intention is very plain: to beg, that travellers on their lawful occasions may be secured from robbers and pirates, amongst other accidents:

* 1 Tim. ii. 1.

Lord's Prayer: which, though it occurs several times in the several services of the morning, occurs but once in this; and cannot easily be recited too often, provided it be with attention and affection.

Hitherto the Litany hath dwelt on no single subject of prayer long; but comprehended a surprising variety of the most needful articles in a very narrow compass. The remainder is of a different nature. It considers our state here, very justly, as furnishing perpetual ground of sad reflection to every thoughtful mind: and applies itself wholly to express to our heavenly Father the sentiments required in such a condition. The seemingly happiest persons in the world are very inconsiderate, if they do not discern a great deal to mourn over, in others and themselves. Yet at the same time, the most afflicted are to blame, if they sink under, either what they see or feel. But the common duty of both is, *in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make their requests known unto God* *. And therefore this part of the Litany, though first introduced on occasion of extraordinary distresses, lying heavy on Christendom 11 or 1200 years ago, will be too seasonable in every age, till one of truer piety and more tranquillity shall come, than hath yet been known, or is likely soon to take place.

As the transgressions, by which we offend God, are the cause of our sufferings, these our supplications begin very properly, with intreating, in Scripture words, that on humbling ourselves before him, he would *not deal with us after our sins, neither reward us after our iniquities* †. Next to this follows, as is repeated in the sequel, an exhortation, *Let us pray:* which may appear somewhat strange, considering

* Phil. iv. 6. † Psalm ciii. x.

the congregation again petition him, in the same words as before; (only changing one for another, still more pathetic;) that he would *arise, help and deliver them* for the *honour of his name:* not for our merits, but his own glorious perfections, and the instruction of his creatures; that we and all men may learn to love and praise and serve him. Yet to this we are indispensably bound, even while the painfullest view of our sorrows and wants is before our eyes: and therefore in the midst of our supplications we proceed immediately to ascribe that glory to the sacred Three, which ever hath been, is, and will be, their due; whether infinite wisdom allots to us prosperity or adversity. Nor is the mixture of doxologies with complaints less common in acts of worship, than it is reasonable. The Book of Psalms uses it frequently: the old Latin and Greek liturgies use it on this very occasion: and surely in our private devotions, even when most afflicted, we still give praise to God.

But though we own it our duty to glorify him in the severest sufferings, if it be his will that we should undergo them: yet conscious of our weakness, we go on to beg his protection against them, or deliverance of us from them, in mutual ejaculations of the utmost warmth: not that moving expressions will any otherwise incline him to grant mercy, than as they fit us to receive it, by imprinting on us a just sense of our dependence; which, if used with sincerity, they naturally do.

Then we close this part of the Litany with a more continued form of address to our merciful *Father;* composed originally above 1100 years ago; corrupted indeed afterwards, by intreating God to *turn from us* all *evils* for the sake of the intercession of his Saints;

but reformed in our liturgy, not only by leaving out that addition, but by inserting for completer security a new clause: *Grant, that in all our troubles we may put our whole trust and confidence in thy mercy.* And thus it is, that we borrow from the Church of Rome. By this prayer, so amended, we humbly confess our infirmities and unworthiness: yet beg, that notwithstanding both, we may, if God sees it proper, escape the afflictions, which we fear: but if not, that being still assured of his goodness to us, we may, with Job, *though he slay us, trust in him**: and that for proof of this, we may as faithfully do our duty under the heaviest pressures, as the highest exaltation; *and evermore serve him in holiness and pureness of living, to his honour and glory;* saying with Job again, *shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil*†? *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord*‡.

What remains of the Litany is the same with the conclusion of the morning and evening prayer: and therefore needs no separate explanation. May God give us grace to use these and all our devotions in so right a manner, that from praying to him amidst the troubles and sorrows of this world, we may be taken, in his good time, to praise him for ever amidst the joys of the next, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

* Job xiii. 15. † Job ii. 10. ‡ Job i. 21.

SERMON XXIX.

1 COR. XIV. 15.

—*I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

ONCE more I entreat your attention to the subject, on which I have so often discoursed from these words. The part of it, which remains, is the Communion Service. But as that service is almost every where separated, and very properly, from the preceding one, by the singing of a Psalm, I would first say a little concerning that much disregarded branch of worship.

As singing is capable of expressing strongly every state, in which the mind can be towards every object; so there never was perhaps any one nation upon earth, civilized or barbarous, that did not make this a part of the honour paid by them to the God, whom they adored. We find in the Old Testament, it was practised by the Jews, before the law was given, as well as after *. The book of Psalms consists wholly of religious songs: and directs the *Saints of the Lord, to sing unto him, and give thanks for a remembrance of his holiness* †: *to sing unto the honour of his name, and make his praise glorious* ‡; *to sing praises unto our God, while we have our being* §. The Prophets foretel, that, in the Gospel times, men *shall sing for*

* Exod. xv. 1, &c.
† Psalm xxx. 4.
‡ Psalm lxvi. 2.
§ Psalm cxlvi. 2.

the majesty of the Lord: and, which brings the prediction home to us, *they shall cry aloud, and glorify God, in the Isles of the sea**. Accordingly St. Paul, not only himself with Silas, even in prison, *sang praises unto God*†; but appoints, that all Christians should *speak to themselves, and admonish one another in Psalms and Hymns and spiritual songs, making melody with grace in their hearts to the Lord* ‡. And St. James prescribes, *Is any one merry?* in a joyful frame on account of blessings received, (for the word, *mirth,* comprehended anciently the most serious kind of gladness,) *let him sing Psalms* §.

In pursuance of these rules, the first Christians made singing a constant part of their worship: as, besides the Ecclesiastical writers, even a heathen informs us ‖. And the whole congregation joined in it. Afterwards indeed the singers by profession, who had been prudently appointed to lead and direct them, by degrees usurped the whole performance ¶. But at the Reformation the people were restored to their rights: and it made a much quicker progress for the pleasure and comfort, which they found in this practice: a circumstance, that ought to endear it to considerate persons not a little. And as the only way of singing known in common parochial churches is by the metre Psalms; unless we join in that, we intirely omit this branch of our duty.

It is very true, the verse translation of the Psalms, generally used, is void of ornament: and hath expressions, often low and flat, sometimes obsolete. And I wish a better were substituted in its place.

* Isaiah xxiv. 14, 15.
† Acts xvi. 23, 24, 25.
‡ Eph. v. 19. Col. iii. 16.
§ James v. 13.
‖ Plin. l. x. Ep. 27.
¶ Bingham iii. 7. 2.

But still in many other cases, ancient solemn forms of words are thought venerable, when they are far from elegant: not to say, that the language of our forefathers, even where it may seem very uncouth at present, had in its time frequently full as much propriety and beauty, as ours. And several words of it have been, for that reason, revived by some of our best modern authors. But at least, the matter, comprised in the words, of which I am speaking, is so highly respectable, that the mind, which is affected only by the phrase, and not by the sense, must be a light one indeed.

Again, it is true also, that the tunes, to which the Psalms are sung, are most of them plain and slow; and the voices of many in the assembly unharmonious and apt to be ill-managed. But tunes, designed for the multitude to join in, who have never been regularly instructed, must be plain and slow, and such as they have been accustomed to: for which purpose the number should be moderate. Ours are many of them recommended, and as it were consecrated, by long usage. Confessors for the Protestant cause have composed them. Martyrs for it have yielded up their dying breath in them. And several of them are thought, by competent judges, no way deficient in real melody. Amongst a variety of people, part of them with bad ears, and most of them with untaught voices, there will be some, that had better totally abstain; only attending to the sense, as well as the sound, of what is uttered by the rest: and others, that should moderate themselves to a prudent degree of lowness, till they have learnt how to exert themselves more properly. But all who are, or can be qualified, and there are few, who cannot, should bear such a part as they are able. It may be done, with-

out in the least disordering the more skilful singers, who perform the very useful office of raising and supporting the tune. This in many congregations is done by the organ, the charity children, or both. But then the organ should express the tunes plainly and distinctly, and make very moderate intervals between the lines; the children should be taught to sing in exact time and concert with it; and the whole congregation should accompany them fervently, yet with prudence. Taking this care, though there should still happen to be some little discords, they would be intirely lost in the general chorus: the effect of which would be noble and elevating, if we took rightly into our thoughts the whole of the matter, instead of cavilling at minute particulars.

Consider the nature of a wild multitude, in its original savage state, met together at the call of some vehement ungoverned passion: how alarming the concourse, how frightful and horrid the confused and hideous cries of it must be. Then consider the same multitude, softened and cultivated by the gentle influences of religion, and unanimously assembling at stated seasons, to sing forth the praises of the wise and good parent of all, and echo to each other the precepts of a rational, and mild, and beneficent life here, as the means of obtaining eternal felicity hereafter. Can there be a happier change of scene, a sweeter and more pleasing view? And suppose the harmony made by them were ever so little better, than *shouting unto God with the voice of triumph,* as the Scripture expresses it, and *making a joyful noise unto the rock of their salvation**: yet what worthy and humane and pious heart is there, that would not be charmed with the sound, and zealously join in it?

* Psalm xlvii. 1. xcv. 1.

We are disposed thus on other occasions. Amongst our ancestors, who judged of propriety as discreetly as ourselves, (to say no more,) the very highest joined humbly and cheerfully with the lowest of their fellow-Christians in the duty of psalmody, however artlessly performed. And I entreat you to reflect what it is, either to disdain, or be ashamed, or be too indolent, to lift up our voices to the honour of our Maker, when we come into his house professedly to worship him, and he hath commanded that one part of his worship shall be this.

But if we will not employ our lips in the service, we may still fix our minds upon it: at least we should not hinder others from doing either. And particularly we should abstain from giving the bad example, and the offence, of indecently holding conversation at that time: for which surely there cannot be so pressing an occasion, but that it may be very safely deferred till after Church, if not altogether omitted.

In the singing of Psalms, different persons use different postures. The prose Psalms, I believe, are and ever have been repeated by all persons every where, standing. In the verse Psalms we all stand at the doxology. And in what goes before, the reason for doing it is exactly the same, and a very strong one: that the whole is sung to the glory of God, and often directly addressed to God. Accordingly we read in the Old Testament, that not only the Levites were *to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at even* *, but that when *they waited with instruments of music to praise the Lord, all Israel stood* †; and again, that they said to the people, *stand up, and bless the Lord your God* ‡. We read likewise, that in a vision of St. John, in the

* 1 Chron. xxii. 30. † 2 Chron. vii. 6. ‡ Neh. ix. 5.

old and excellent collect, to beg of him, *unto whom all hearts be open,* so *to cleanse the thoughts of ours, by the inspiration of his holy Spirit,* by breathing into us with lasting efficacy good inclinations and purposes, *that we may* as *perfectly* as our present state admits, *love* him in our souls, and *magnify* him in our words and lives. Purity of intention is both in general requisite for approaching God's altar, and more especially for going through the next part of the office aright: in which, after hearing the Ten Commandments rehearsed to us, we pray God to *have mercy upon us,* and pardon us, so far as we have transgressed either the letter or the spirit of them, as explained by our blessed Redeemer, *and incline our hearts to keep* each of them better for the future. It doth not appear, that this form of devotion was ever used in any liturgy before our own. But surely, taking the Commandments with the Gospel interpretation of them, it is a very instructive and edifying one. And they, who think the confession in the Morning Prayer not particular enough, have sufficient room here to supply that imagined defect.

Next follows a prayer for the King. The primitive Christians, in every public office, presented a supplication for their Sovereign. Now in this office, unless it were put in the beginning, few in proportion would join in it when the sacrament is administered, considering how many return home without receiving. And therefore it is placed here, just after the Ten Commandments, of which the authority of the magistrate is one main support, as they are of that in return: and we pray the Almighty, that, in *mercy to his Church, he will so rule the King's heart,* whom in the course of his providence he hath *chosen* to reign over us, and to be his *servant* and *minister to*

As in the Morning Prayer, so in the Communion Service, for the same reason, after reading the Scripture, we recite the Creed: only there we have that of the ancient Latin Church, here that of the ancient Greek; made in the first General Council, held at Nice, above 1400 years ago, and thence called Nicene; excepting, that some small additions were inserted since; all of them, but one*, about 50 years after.

In this Creed, we profess ourselves *to believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,* because some had spoken of the human and divine nature of our Saviour, which they called Jesus and Christ, as two persons not united. The words, *light of light,* intimating, that his divine nature is from the Father, as light is from the sun, or as one light without diminution of itself kindles another, were intended for some imperfect illustration, (and doubtless a very imperfect one it is, and any other must be,) of his mysterious generation. The words, *Lord, and giver of life,* ascribed to the Spirit, are not to be joined, as one single attribute: but are taken from two different texts of Scripture: in the one of which he is called, according to the marginal reading, *the Lord the Spirit*†; and said in the other, *to give life*‡, that is, the spiritual life of grace. The phrase, *who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,* may signify, either his deriving from the latter, as well as the former, his eternal subsistence; or, since that hath been disputed between the Latin and Greek Church, his being sent by both into the hearts of men, as the Scripture plainly affirms he is§.

After the Creed another Psalm is sung: and then

* Consisting of the words, *and the Son:* which came in some hundreds of years after. See *Nichols.*

† 2 Cor. iii. 18. ‡ Ver. 6. § John xiv. 26. xv. 26. xvii. 7.

these things being ever unsuitable. And *the first day of the week* is recommended in Scripture for purposes of charity*, as well as set apart for *making supplications and giving thanks for all men*†. But they are both more peculiarly proper with a view to the Communion: in which light I shall now consider them.

When we commemorate our Saviour's dying love to us all, we ought surely to think of expressing our love to our brethren: which must be shewn by promoting both their spiritual good and their temporal. To the former belong those sentences, which require, that they who are able, should contribute to the maintenance of a Gospel ministry, where it wants their help. And they require it strongly, as you will perceive by reading them. For indeed we seldom or never read them to you, that we may not seem to plead our own cause: excepting in some few of our Churches, where the primitive practice, (needful in too many more,) of giving oblations to the Minister, as well as alms to the poor, at the Sacrament, is preserved or restored. The rest of the sentences exhort to the latter duty of relieving the sick and needy. What is generally given for them on this occasion must be considered not as the whole, but a sample and earnest of your charity; I hope, a small one in comparison of what you give at other times, and I trust, is every where faithfully applied as it ought, with most religious and prudent care.

But as there are few in proportion to whom we can do good with our substance; and many, that are much above our alms, yet greatly need our prayers; we proceed to offer them up *for the whole state of Christ's Church, militant,* that is, carrying on a war-

* 1 Cor. xvi. 2. † 1 Tim. ii. 1.

to ask, and happy to have in our favour: and God forbid, that we should not give you ours, when we are asked it, with as much fidelity and as much secresy, as any ministers of any Church whatever!

There is the less occasion that I should enlarge on this office, because I have explained in my Lectures on the Church Catechism, the principal points relating to the Lord's Supper. I have shewn you in particular, that the expression of *eating and drinking damnation to ourselves*, (which is used by St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians *, and from thence taken into the exhortation at the communion,) means only bringing upon ourselves a condemnation to some punishment from God, without determining of what kind. For the verses immediately following, (which I shall presently repeat to you,) very clearly show that the word in the original, which is here translated *damnation*, ought to have been rendered in this place, as it is in several others, *judgment*. Now *judgment* is a general term that signifies any degree of correction or punishment in this life, or the next. That which had been incurred by those unworthy receivers to whom the Apostle wrote, was only correction in the present life. For undoubtedly he told them the worst of their danger, and he tells them of nothing else. The very next words are: *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*, are dead. Then follows, what entirely clears up the matter: *If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* The punishment therefore of receiving unworthily will either be extended to another world or confined to this according to the degree of the fault:

* Ch. xi. 29.

with the answers, and the substance of all that follows constantly, as far as, *glory be to thee, O Lord most high,* appear to have been used in the Communion service 1500 years ago: and might probably descend from the Apostolic times. Even the custom of appropriating particular prefaces to the more considerable festivals, is 1200 years old, if not more.

And now approaching nearer to the act of receiving, we again solemnly acknowledge our own unworthiness, as all the old liturgies did, though not so fully: and pray, *that our sinful bodies may be made clean by Christ's body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood:* which expressions have been censured, as if they implied, that each of these, at least the latter of them, (his blood,) had some peculiar efficacy, of which the other was destitute. But this cannot be intended: because very soon after, the *preservation of our bodies and souls* also *unto everlasting life,* is ascribed separately, both to his body and to his blood, as it is in Scripture also *. Therefore the distinction made here, was only meant for some kind of elegance in speech: and it much resembles what St. Clement the Roman, whom St. Paul intitles *his fellow-labourer* †, hath said in his Epistle to the Corinthians, that Christ *gave his flesh for our flesh, and his soul for our souls* ‡.

After this follows the Prayer of Consecration, or setting apart the bread and wine to the sacred purpose, in which they are about to be employed. A prayer hath been used for that end, at least 1600 years. And the mention, which ours makes of the institution of the Lord's Supper, from the words, *who in the same night that he was betrayed,* to the conclusion, is in every old liturgy in the world. The Roman-

* Heb. x. 10. 19. † Phil. iv. 3. ‡ Sect. 49.

ists, have put into their prayer of consecration, names of saints, and commemorations of the dead, which we have thrown out. And indeed we have left nothing, that so much as needs explaining: unless it may be useful to observe to you, that our Saviour's *one oblation of himself* is opposed to the various kinds of oblations under the law; and, *once offered*, to the continual repetition of them: though probably a further view was, to intimate, that he is not, as the Papists pretend, really sacrificed anew in this holy ordinance.

The first part of the words, which the minister speaks at delivering the elements, is very ancient: the rest is added by our Church; and the whole is unexceptionable. The posture of kneeling, which we use, when we receive, is a very proper one. Some indeed think, that the Apostles received in the posture which they used at meals, and that we ought to imitate them in this. Now if so; to imitate them strictly, we must not sit, (as these persons do,) but lie all along: for so did the Apostles at table. But indeed we may rather suppose, that when our Saviour blessed the bread and wine, this being an address to God, both he and they were in some posture of adoration: and that they changed it before receiving, is not likely, considering how different that was from a common meal. Nor does it appear, that any part of the Christian Church till of late years, ever used any other posture than that of kneeling or standing; by each of which they meant to signify worship. We use the former: but with an express declaration inserted in all our prayer books, that *no adoration is hereby intended or ought to be done, either to the sacramental bread and wine; (for that were idolatry to be abhorred of all Christians;) or to any corporal pre-*

sence of Christ's natural flesh and blood: for they are in Heaven and not here *. We kneel therefore only to adore the invisible God: and to be in a fit posture for those prayers and praises which can never be more properly offered up to him. And why any persons should prefer a different posture we cannot see.

Having communicated, we again repeat, after a long interval, the Lord's Prayer. For since, *to as many, as* truly *receive him, he gives power to become the sons of God* †; we may hope we have now strengthened our title to apply, under that name, to *Our Father, which is in Heaven, &c.*

Then we *intirely,* that is, with our whole hearts, *desire* him, *to accept this our sacrifice,* or service, *of praise and thanksgiving,* which we have offered up to him: begging leave at the same time to *offer up ourselves, body and soul,* as dedicated to his will: which is the great end of all our devotions; yet never mentioned in the Romish mass-book. We pray also once more for the whole Church: and lastly for our fellow-communicants, as well as ourselves, that we may be *fulfilled,* that is, filled full, and as the Psalmist expresses it, *abundantly satisfied* ‡, *with God's grace and benediction.*

After this, as our blessed Lord sung an hymn § with his disciples after the Passover (in imitation of whom the whole Christian Church hath used one in commemorating *Our Passover, sacrificed for us* ‖,) we use one likewise, as ancient, in substance, as the fourth century at least. It were better indeed, that we sung it: if there did not, alas, often want numbers, and generally skill. The beginning of it is the song of the holy Angels in St. Luke: on which foundation

* Rubric after Communion. † John i. 12.
‡ Psalm xxxvi. 8. § Matt. xxvi. 30. ‖ 1 Cor. v. 7,

derstanding, that inward sense of our Maker's goodness to us, which even now is delightful, beyond the conception of those, who have not experienced it; and shall hereafter be so heightened, as vastly to exceed the present conceptions of the best of us; may *keep our hearts and minds* *, our judgments and affections, *in the knowledge and love of God and his Christ:* and that every *blessing* of the holy Trinity may be distributed *amongst us, and remain with us always.* Grant this, O heavenly Father, for the sake, &c.

* Phil. iv. 7.

Protestant. Those of the former communion, it seems, think us of the latter quite out of the way to salvation, and accordingly are unwearied in persuading, as they have opportunity, the members of our Church, especially the lower and more ignorant part of them, to quit it for theirs. The necessity of doing this, they insist upon sometimes with so much plausibility, and always with so much confidence, that I hope you will not think a few discourses ill employed on a subject of such very great importance both to our private satisfaction and public security, in refuting the arguments they usually bring against us, and *testifying that this is the true grace of God, wherein ye stand.* To proceed regularly in this matter, I shall

I. Enquire what is the rule of Christian faith and life: and

II. Examine by this rule the peculiar doctrines and practices of the Romish Church.

I. I shall enquire what is the rule of Christian faith and life: from whence we are to learn what things our religion requires as necessary, and what it forbids as unlawful: for, if we do the one and avoid the other, we are undoubtedly safe. Now as Jesus Christ is the sole *author of our faith* *, those things, and those alone, which he taught himself, and commissioned his Disciples to teach, are parts of our faith. What his doctrine was we find in no less than four accounts of his life and preaching given in the Gospels. To what belief his disciples converted men, we find in the Acts. What they taught men after their conversion, we read in the Epistles. These several Books, which make up the New Testament, all Christians allow to contain an original and

* Heb. xii. 2.

itself, yet the Church of Rome objects that it is not clear to us: even to the learned many things are hard to be understood; which therefore to the unlearned must be impossible. Nay sometimes they tell us not one sentence of it hath a meaning, which by our own private judgment we can be certain of. But surely the Apostles were not worse writers *with* a divine assistance, than others commonly are *without* it. What they spoke and preached was plain; else they spoke to no purpose: and why should not the same things be as plain when they were written down? Some passages indeed might to some persons be difficult, even at first: and more are doubtless become so by length of time. But that the main of the New Testament is intelligible enough cannot be with any modesty denied. And for the rest, what at first sight is difficult, may with due consideration of our own, and help of others, be made easy; what is obscurely expressed in one place, may be clearly expressed in another; and what is clearly expressed in no place, we may safely for that very reason conclude it is not neccessary for us to understand or believe.

But allowing the Scriptures to have been at first sufficiently intelligible, how do we know they are come down to us uncorrupted? I answer, by all the same arguments which prove the incorruptness of any other ancient book in the world, and by this argument farther, that these books having many more copies of them, being much wider dispersed and much more carefully read, and warmly disputed about, than any other whatever: it is in proportion more incredible that either chance or design should alter them in any thing considerable without discovery from some quarter, even were no particular Providence to watch over writings so worthy of its

Those converts again, knowing it to be their indispensible duty, could not fail to instruct with the same diligence, ministers their flocks, parents their children, every Christian his neighbour. And thus, by a continued succession of teaching, all the doctrines of religion are handed down in their Church, they tell us, uncorrupted to this day. Whoever either added, omitted or changed any thing, must, they think, by every one around him, be immediately charged with a mistake; and, if he persisted in it, convicted of a heresy, whilst the rest were confirmed in the ancient truth. And therefore to hold what the Church holds is a rule that never can mislead us. Now it must be owned indeed that our Saviour delivered his doctrine to the Apostles, and they to all the world by word of mouth; and this way of delivery at first was sufficient, and therefore St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians *to hold fast the traditions he had taught them, whether by word or by letter* *. But then in the nature of things how long could this last? Suppose but the easiest common story were to be told from one person to another, without being written down, for only 100 or 200 years, and let each person as he received it have never so strict a charge to tell it in the same manner: yet, long before the end of that time, what security could we possibly have that it was true at first and unaltered still? And you cannot but see there is much less security that a considerable number of doctrines, especially such as compose the Popish Creed, should be brought down safe for 1700 years together, through so many millions of hands, that were all liable through ignorance, forgetfulness, and superstition, to mistake them, or, through knavery and design, to alter them. But it will be said, in a case of such impor-

* 2 Thess. ii. 15.

tance as religion, men would be more careful in delivering truth than in others. Undoubtedly they ought: but who can be secure that they would? It is of equal importance to be careful in practising it too; yet we all know how this hath been neglected in the world: and therefore have reason to think the other hath been no less so. But whoever made the first change, they say, must have been immediately discovered. Now so far from this, that persons make changes in what they relate without discovering it themselves; alterations come in by insensible degrees; one man leaves out, or varies, or adds one little circumstance: the next, another: till it grow imperceptibly into a different thing. In one age a doctrine is delivered as a probable opinion, the following age speaks of it as certain truth: and the third advances it into an article of faith. Perhaps an opposition rises upon this, as many have done: some have said such a doctrine *was* delivered to them, others that it was not: and who can tell whether at last the right side or the wrong have prevailed? Only this is certain, that which soever prevails, though by a small majority at first, will use all means of art and power to make it appear an universal consent at last: and then plead uninterrupted tradition. But though such things as these may possibly be done in almost any age, yet they are easy to be done in such ages, as were five or six of those, that preceded the reformation; when by the confession of their own historians, both Clergy and Laity were so universally and so monstrously ignorant and vicious, that nothing was too bad for them to do, or too absurd for them to believe. But still they tell us, we Protestants receive it upon the authority of tradition, that Scripture is the Word of God: and why can we not as well receive other

things upon the same authority? I answer, we receive Scripture by no means upon the authority of tradition merely: much less the tradition of their present Church; but partly on account of its own reasonableness, and the characters of divine wisdom in it; partly from the testimony, which one part of it bears to the other; and lastly upon the written evidence given us, chiefly indeed by the earliest Christians, but in some measure also by Jews and Heathens themselves, that the authors of these books were the Disciples of our Lord, and the things said by them true. But then to tell us, that because we receive Scripture, upon this evidence, we must therefore receive a long list of doctrines upon mere tradition after 17 ages, is to affirm that the memory of things may be as well preserved for ever by general rumour and hearsay as by authentic records. But here they plead that the tradition which they depend on, is not altogether unwritten, but partly recorded by the ancient fathers of the Church. To this we answer, that we acknowledge truly ancient writers, in matters, where they all agree, to be a very valuable evidence of the faith, though at the same time a fallible one. And we can prove undeniably, that these writers, in proportion as they lived near the days of the Apostles, were of our faith, not theirs. But as this is a proof in our favour that few persons are capable of entering into, so we have happily a much shorter. For if antiquity be an argument; the greater the antiquity the stronger the argument: and therefore the authority of the Bible, for this, as well as many other reasons, is the strongest of all. An original account is always to be depended on in the first place. Such others, as come a little after, in point of time, may be of considerable use to

unto them, full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition *. And just as St. Paul had foretold it would happen among Christians. *Beware lest any man spoil you through vain deceit, after the tradition of men, and not after Christ* †. But here they reply, that, let this passage be designed against whom it will, it cannot possibly fall on them. For, however uncertain tradition might become of itself in process of time, and however difficult it may be for private persons to judge of doctrines by it, yet the judgment of the Catholic Church in these points is infallible, and theirs is that Catholic Church. Now that the Church is infallible, they sometimes attempt to prove from reason. Making it so was the only way to end disputes, and therefore God being wise and good, *must* have made it so. But certainly a much more effectual way of preventing disputes and errors had been to have made every single man infallible; and yet God hath not done this. It might therefore be more modest for them to let him show his wisdom and goodness in what way he pleases. The Jewish Church we know was not infallible. For they denied their Saviour, and it was by following tradition that they came to do it. How then does it appear that the Christian must be more infallible? Why, they have texts of Scripture to prove this. But if, as they commonly tell us, the Scripture can neither be proved nor understood but by the infallible authority of the Church; how can the infallible authority of the Church be proved or understood by Scripture? However, let us hear these texts. Our Saviour told his Apostles, that the Comforter *should come and lead them into all truth* ‡. But perhaps this was said only to the Apostles: and, had it been said to them and

* Mark vii. 5. 9. † Col. ii. 8. ‡ John xvi. 13.

and in some measure always is, a pillar and support of truth; and so in his proportion is every believer: and therefore of every single good Christian our Saviour says, in the Revelation*, *I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.* But then it does not follow from hence, that any one Christian, or the majority of Christians, so support the truth, as that they do and ever will profess it all, without any mixture of error: and unless this be done, there is no infallibility. But they argue farther, that our Saviour directs†, *if a man neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen man and a publican.* But what is he there speaking of? Let us read the context. *If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go, and tell him his fault between him and thee alone. If he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more. If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church. If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen man and a publican.* That is, if a man have done you an injury, first admonish him privately of it. If that avail not, tell the Church: not the universal Church sure throughout all the world, but the particular one you both belong to. And if he will not reform upon their reproof, look on him no longer as a true Christian, but an ill man. Here therefore is not one word said about disobeying the determination of the Catholic Church concerning a disputed doctrine: but about slighting the admonition of a particular Church concerning a known sin, and particular Churches are owned to be fallible.

Again, they say it is an article of our creed, that we *believe in the Catholic Church.* But then they know the meaning of this is not that we believe whatever this Church, or any who please to call them-

* Rev. iii. 12. † Mat. xviii. 17.

ferent opinion about this matter will produce a different rule of faith. And it is a matter, in which the opinions of the Romanists differ greatly. Many of them say the Pope is infallible, and he himself claims to be so. But then some think he is so in matters of faith only, some in matters of fact too. In most Popish countries it would be looked upon as heresy to deny him this prerogative; in others as great weakness to ascribe it to him. For a large part of them say nothing is infallible under a general Council, regularly called. But then they have so many different opinions about what makes a Council general, and what call of one is regular, that some of them reckon at least eighteen general Councils, and some at most but seven or eight: and indeed they might very justly question whether, strictly speaking, there was ever one such in the world. But farther: which of the Decrees and Canons of these Councils, amongst the infinite forgeries there have been, are genuine, and which not, here again is an endless controversy; and another as endless what the meaning of some of the most important ones of them is. In consequence of this they differ and dispute, and have done for ages, (as united as they would seem to be,) not only about such silly questions, as whether the Virgin Mary was conceived in original sin or not, (and yet about this they were calling one another Heretics for 300 years, and their general Councils, with all their infallibility, have not dared to determine the matter to this day;) but they quarrel equally about things of the greatest moment. To give but one instance of many, whether a king may, for heresy or disobedience to the Church, be deposed, and his subjects discharged of their allegiance, is a question of as much weight as can well be put.

body of Christians considered as one, which indeed is the only true Catholic or Universal Church. But the whole body of Christians, in the nature of things, can never meet: and, were it as easy, as it is difficult, to collect their several opinions, what one point should we find them all in all ages agree in as necessary, besides those general doctrines of Christianity, that are on every hand allowed to be clearly contained in Scripture? Which way soever then we seek for a rule of faith, to Scripture-doctrine we must return: and therefore the best way is, never to depart from it.

But here some of the Romanists (for they differ about it) will say we wrong them. They admit Scripture for the rule of faith. But do they admit it for the only one? This they dare not say. Or, if they did, will they allow us, when we have this rule, to know what it means? No, we must never understand the least part of it, though ever so plain, in any different sense from what the Church is pleased to appoint. What then is this but mocking mankind, and giving with one hand, what they immediately take away with the other? But we, they say, are in a pitiable condition, that, having only the dead letter of Scripture to go by, and no living guide or judge to direct us in the interpretation of it, as they have; controversies are always among us, and can never be decided. To this we answer, that controversies are what they themselves, even with persecution to help them, can neither prevent or end any more than we. And in matters of property indeed, some decision, right or wrong, must be made. Society could not subsist without it: but what need of an infallible decision in matters of faith? Why is it not sufficient that every man determine for himself as well as he

pretence to being directed by infallibility, ends in being led blindfold by men, confessedly as fallible as themselves. But all Christians are commanded, they say, *to obey them that have the rule over them in the Lord**. And it is true, the teaching of the ministers of the Gospel ought to be attended upon: their doctrine followed in all clear cases, and their judgment respected even in doubtful ones. But still we are no more bound to follow our spiritual guides into opinions plainly false, or practices plainly sinful, than to follow a common guide down a precipice, or into the sea, let our knowledge of the way be ever so little, or the other's pretences to infallible skill in it ever so great. The rule therefore for the unlearned and ignorant in religion is this. Let each man improve his own judgment and increase his own knowledge as much as he can: and be fully assured that God will expect no more. In matters, for which he must rely on authority, let him rely on the authority of that Church which God's Providence hath placed him under, rather than another which he hath nothing to do with; and trust those, who by encouraging free inquiry, appear to love truth, rather than such as, by requiring all their doctrines to be implicitly obeyed, seem conscious that they will not bear to be fairly tried. But never let him prefer any authority before that which is the highest of all authority, the written word of God. This therefore let us all carefully study, and not doubt but that whatever things in it are necessary to be believed, are easy to be understood. This let us firmly rely on, and trust to its truth, when it declares itself *able to make us wise unto salvation, perfect, and tho-*

* Heb. xiii. 17.

SERMON XXXI.

1 PET. V. 12.

—Exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.

The general rule of conduct for men to go by is reason: contrary to what this plainly teaches, we neither can nor ought to believe; but beyond what it teaches, on sufficient authority, we justly may. Persuasion founded on authority is called faith: and that which is founded on the authority of our blessed Lord, Christian faith.

Now the rule of this faith, the only means by which we, who live so many ages after him, can learn with certainty what things he hath required as necessary, and what he hath forbidden as unlawful, I have proved to be the holy Scriptures. For these, which confessedly give us a true account of Christianity, do also, as I have shewn to you, give us a full and sufficiently clear account of it; and there is none whatever besides that can be equally depended on. Other antiquity compared with that of Scripture is modern: tradition in its own nature soon grows uncertain: and infallibility is no where to be found upon earth. The only thing then we have to rely on in Christianity, is the written word of God. Whatever this forbids is sinful: whatever it requires as a condition of salvation is necessary: whatever it does not so require, is not necessary. By these rules therefore of reason and Scripture, let us now proceed, as

when present. *See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant: worship God* *. And when some among the Colossians had affected unjustifiable practices of this kind, St. Paul censures them as being in a very dangerous error. *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of Angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen* †. Yet does the Church of Rome intrude so much farther as to pay undue worship to beings far below angels: not only to the Saints in Heaven, but to some who were so wicked on earth, that there is great reason to fear they are in Hell, and to others that are mere fictions of their own imaginations, and never were at all. For the sake of these, and through their merits, they desire in their public and authorized prayers, God's mercy, sometimes quite omitting to mention the merits of Christ, and sometimes joining his and theirs together. Farther than this, they directly pray to them, in the house of God, and in the same posture in which they pray to God; and that not only to intercede with him for them, but, in so many words, that they themselves *would bestow grace and mercy upon them, would forgive the guilt of their sins, deliver them from Hell, and grant them a place in Heaven.* What pretence is there now in Christianity for such things as these? and what doth this tend to, but making the ignorant, especially, think their favourite Saint can do every thing for them, right or wrong? To him therefore they recommend themselves, not by a religious life, but by flattering addresses and costly presents: on his intercession they often depend much more than on our blessed Saviour's; and being secure, as they think, of the favour of these courtiers of Heaven, pay little

* Rev. xix. 10. xxii. 9. † Col. ii. 18.

ever they apply to St. Joachim and tell him, that *as his daughter can possibly deny him nothing, it is in his power to do every thing he will for them.* This, you see, is being very artful in making interest: only it is more art than is necessary. For since we are both permitted and appointed to approach God through Christ directly, who, we are certain, both doth hear and will help us, we shall prejudice, instead of benefiting our cause, by making underhand applications to other persons, who perhaps never come to know of our petitions, and, if they do, are displeased at them; or, if they were not, can be in comparison of little use to us.

Yet to judge by the practice of the Romish Church, who would not think that the whole New Testament were filled with precepts for the worship of the Saints, especially the blessed Virgin? Whereas, even in the Gospels she is but seldom and occasionally mentioned; our Saviour seeming on purpose to take less notice of her, as if he foresaw what advantages taking more would give to the extravagancies of after times. In the Acts she is just mentioned once. In the Epistles and Revelation not at all. Yet these are not half the monstrous things that the Romanists are guilty of about her. They have invented a fable of her body being taken up into Heaven, and appointed a solemn festival in honour of it. They have instituted a form of devotion called the Rosary, in which ten addresses are made to her, for one to God; and successive Popes have granted large indulgencies and blessings to all that shall say it. Then their private writers about her have gone incredible lengths. One of their Cardinals, Bonaventure, by putting her name instead of God's, and some other necessary alterations, hath applied the whole Book of Psalms to

inventors of these things, says he, lessened among men the reverence of the Divine Nature, and introduced errors concerning it *. The Jews, though the Old Testament figuratively expresses, in words, the power and attributes of God by parts of the human form, were yet most strictly forbidden all sensible representation of him under any form. *Take good heed unto yourselves,* says Moses, *for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spoke to you in Horeb; lest ye corrupt yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, and make the similitude of any figure; for the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God* †. Accordingly we find, that when they had made a golden image, though it was expressly designed in honour of that God who brought them out of Egypt, it was notwithstanding punished as idolatry. And far from allowing to Christians, what was then forbidden the Jews, St. Paul most severely condemns it in the very Heathens, that *when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man* ‡. Yet how near doth this approach to what the Church of Rome doth now, in making pictures of God the Father! Our blessed Saviour indeed, having taken on him human nature, is capable of being represented in a human form. But, as all such representations must be imaginary ones, so they are useless ones too: the memorial of himself, which he hath appointed in the Sacrament, we may be assured is sufficient to all good

* Varro ap. S. Aug. de Civ. Dei. l. 4. c. 31. where he says they had none for 170 years. But Tarquinius Priscus introduced them. See Tenison on Idol. p. 59.

† Deut. iv. 15—24. ‡ Rom. i. 21. 23.

is, that such cautions never are, or can be observed by the multitude. Place sensible objects before them to direct their worship to: and in those objects their worship will terminate. This the primitive Christians saw too plainly in the Heathens, ever to think of imitating them. Accordingly neither images nor pictures were allowed in Churches for near 400 years. And when, after being more than once condemned, they came to be allowed, no honour was intended to be paid to them. On the contrary, when it began to be paid, which indeed was not long, it was severely censured, and particularly in the eighth century, by above 300 Bishops, assembled in council at Constantinople. But about thirty years after, the second council of Nice, (so ill did councils agree,) established it. Yet even this council held representations of God to be unlawful. And all the Western countries, except Italy, under the Pope's immediate direction, continued to condemn the *worship* of *all* representations, for some ages afterwards. But by degrees it first became general; and then so grossly scandalous, that the Church of Rome, it seems, hath judged it the wisest way to leave the second Commandment, which too plainly forbids these things, out of their smaller books of devotion, under the absurd pretence of its being only a part, I suppose an insignificant one, of the first: though, since they have been charged with this, they have thought fit in some of them, but not in all, to restore it again. And here let us quit the article of image-worship, with the Psalmist's remark upon it. *They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord* *.

But there still remains another object of Popish worship, the Sacramental bread and wine. For they

* Psalm cxv. 8, 9.

the right hand of God, should at the same time be on earth in the right hand of the Priest; and that there should be several thousands of those bodies upon earth at many hundreds of miles distance from one another, and yet all these be that very same one body also, this is such talk, that for sober persons in their sober senses to use it, and keep their countenance, is very strange. If one and one be two, then one body of Christ here, and one body of Christ there, make two bodies of Christ, which they own he hath not. And if one body can be in more than one place at one time, we may all of us perhaps be now this very instant at Rome as well as here: a man may be at ever so many thousand miles distance from himself, and afterwards he may come and meet himself, (as two of their pretended real bodies of Christ often do;) and then pass by himself and go away from himself to the same distance he was at before: he may in one place be standing still, in another be carried along, and so be in motion and not in motion at the same time. Men may say such things as these if they will: and they may believe them if they can. But in order to it, well do they direct their poor people to professs in their English manual of prayers before mass, 1725, p. 409. *Herein I utterly renounce the judgment of my senses, and all human understanding.*

Here therefore we fix our foot: if these things be to every man living evidently absurd and impossible, then let nobody ever regard the most specious pretences of proving such doctrines, or the authority of a Church that maintains them. It is no hard matter for an artful man, a little practised in disputing, so to confound a plain man upon almost any subject, that he shall not well know how to answer, though he sees himself to be right and the other wrong. This is an

do not see the particular manner in which some things said concerning it are true: but in transubstantiation there are many things we see to be false, and which can in no manner be true. Let them show us any contradiction in the doctrine of the Trinity, and we will believe it no longer. In the mean time, since we have shewn contradiction in transubstantiation, let *them* believe *that* no longer.

But they have Scripture to plead for it: now if this were a doctrine of Scripture, it would sooner prove Scripture to be false, than Scripture could prove it to be true; and therefore the Papists, by making such a monstrous absurdity an article of faith, have loaded their religion with a weight, which, did it belong to Christianity, were able to sink it. But, God be thanked, Scripture is no more on their side than reason. We know indeed that our Saviour said when he gave the Sacrament, *this is my body*. But so at another time he said, *verily verily I am the door of the sheep:* and at a third, *I am the vine*. And so have all mankind always called a representation of any thing by the name of what it represented. Why then is he not to be understood in the same figure here? How do we think the Apostles understood him but as they were used to do in such cases? They who were so backward at comprehending difficult things, and so ready to ask questions about them, did they without any surprize or any question apprehend that our Saviour then took his own body in his own hand, and gave that one body to each of his twelve Apostles at the same time, and that each of them swallowed him down their throats, though he was all the while sitting at the table along with them? Such things are too ridiculous to be mentioned in a serious place, and yet these men force us to it by gravely requiring

not true that he, and he only, who eateth the Sacrament, shall dwell in Christ and live by him. For persons may possibly have no opportunity of receiving the Sacrament, and yet be very good Christians, and too many receive it frequently, and yet are very bad Christians. The meaning therefore plainly is, that our Saviour's coming and suffering in the flesh, and shedding his blood for mankind, is the spiritual life of the world: that whoever imbibes the doctrine he taught in his life, and partakes by faith of the benefits he procured at his death, his soul is inwardly strengthened by them, and shall be finally preserved to a happy immortality. For in this spiritual and figurative sense he immediately directs his Disciples to understand his words: when misunderstanding them in a gross and literal one had somewhat staggered them. *Doth this*, says he, *offend you? It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life.* His manner of expression had the same intent with that passage of St. Paul *, where he says, *the Israelites did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink. For they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.* The Papists themselves do not think from hence, that the Jews did eat and drink Christ literally: and Christians do it in the same manner they did, only with a clearer and more distinct faith. For in this spiritual sense, Christ himself explains his words: we firmly believe *his body and blood to be verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper;* that is, an union with him, to be not only represented, but really and effectually communicated to the worthy

* 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

express it, could make God? By degrees then this doctrine prevailed; till, in the 13th century, it was established as an article of faith. And when once the speculative error, of believing the consecrated bread and wine to be literally the body and blood of Christ, obtained, the practical one of worshipping them as such, quickly followed. For though a decent respect was always paid to the Sacrament, yet a direct adoration to the elements was never paid, till the dark and superstitious ages above-mentioned introduced so senseless an idolatry, to the infinite scandal of religion. May God, who mercifully winked at the times of Heathen ignorance, overlook this less excusable folly of Christians, and *forgive them, for they know not what they do.* But let us all remember, that our case will be much worse than theirs, if, after the light hath so clearly shone upon us, we return to darkness again: if, as the Apostle expresses it, *we change the truth of God into a lie, and worship the creature instead of the Creator, who is blessed for evermore**. *Amen.*

* Rom. i. 25.

command to receive the bread, and therefore they are obliged by the same command, to receive the cup: which that they did accordingly, the eleventh chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, makes as plain as words can make any thing. Not to say further, that if the sixth of St. John relate immediately to the Sacrament, as they are sometimes very positive it doth, the fifty-third verse of that chapter expressly declares, that, unless we *drink the blood of the Son of man,* as well *as eat his flesh,* we *have no life in us.*

But they tell us, our Saviour himself, after his resurrection, administered the Sacrament in one kind only. For St. Luke says, that sitting down to eat with the two Disciples at Emmaus, *He took bread and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them:* and, upon their knowing him, *vanished out of their sight**. Now it happens, that this was not administering the Sacrament at all, but doing just the same thing, which the Evangelists, in just the same words tell us he did, when he fed the multitudes with the loaves and fishes; and indeed at every meal he eat. For the Jews in the beginning of every meal of theirs, use the very same custom to this day†. But they further plead, that however that be, at least when in the Acts of the Apostles it is said, the *Disciples met together to break bread on the first day of the week*‡: this must be the Sacrament; and the cup is not once mentioned there as given. We answer, it is not certain that even this was the Sacrament: and supposing it was, as, in Scripture-language, common feasts are expressed by the single phrase of eating bread, which yet surely does not prove, that

* Luke xxiv. 30, 31. † Buxtorf. Synag. Jud. c. 12.

‡ Acts xx. 7.

the Cup they tell us, may be drank of immoderately, may be spilled, many dreadful inconveniencies may happen from trusting it with the laity. Now it is strange our Saviour should not be wise enough to foresee these inconveniencies: it is strange we should not experience them neither: and it adds to the wonder not a little, that the whole Church of Christ, for 1200 years, should not be able to find them out any more than we. For in all that time, the cup was constantly given to the laity in their public communions, though there are some instances, yet neither many, nor early ones, in which the bread alone was carried to private houses. And when some of the laity, for absurd reasons, refused to take the cup, no less than three Popes condemned them. But superstitious imaginations gradually increasing amongst Christians, a custom arose first of giving the bread dipt in wine instead of both separate, and at last in the 15th century the council of Constance, the same which decreed so honestly, that promises made to the prejudice of the Catholic faith ought not to be kept*, decreed also very modestly, that notwithstanding (for so they express it) our Saviour administered both kinds, one only shall be administered for the future to the laity. And now it is made an article of their Creed, that the whole Sacrament is given by giving this part: so that whoever shall say both are necessary, (which, if it be not a truth, one should think could not be a heresy,) is by the council of Trent pronounced accursed.

Another difference between the Church of Rome and ours with respect to the Sacrament is this. They hold that, as often as it is celebrated, Christ is truly and properly offered up a sacrifice for our sins.

* See Courayer's Council of Trent, Vol. i. p. 595.

that a particular absolution from a Priest is necessary, if it can be had, for the pardon of every mortal sin, *i. e.* every sin by which any person without repentance forfeits his title to Heaven: and that a particular confession of every material circumstance of every such sin, is necessary for absolution. And the practice of these things they apprehend to give their Church an unspeakable advantage over ours.

The necessity of such absolution they plead for from our Saviour's words to his Apostles: *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in Heaven* *. *Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained* †. Now certainly these words did not put it in the power of the Apostles themselves, to pardon or refuse to pardon whom they pleased, right or wrong. They could use the keys of the kingdom of Heaven no further than he saw fit, *who openeth, and no man shutteth: who shutteth, and no man openeth* ‡. Yet the Apostles had great powers by virtue of these words, which we have not: the power of discerning by the spirit, in many cases at least, and therefore of declaring, who were penitent and pardoned, who otherwise: the power of inflicting and continuing miraculous punishments, on wicked persons, which is *binding and retaining* their sins; and of removing such punishments, which is *losing and remitting* them. But these things the Romish Clergy can no more claim than we. What then besides can there be conveyed by these words of our Lord? A power of preaching that Gospel, according to the terms of which alone, the sins of men shall be forgiven or punished; a power of admitting persons into a state

* Matth. xviii. 18. † John xx. 23. ‡ Rev. iii. 7.

necessary. And whenever persons think it so, we are ready both to hear them with the utmost secresy, and to assist them with our best care: to direct them how they may be forgiven, if we think they are not; to pronounce them forgiven, if we think they are. Only we must beg them to remember, that none but God can pardon sins as to their consequences in another world. Men indeed may take off from sinners the censures of the Church if they have incurred them; but as to any thing farther, all we can do is either to pray to God that he would forgive them, (which was the only form of absolution till the eleventh century at least) or else to declare that he hath done so. And let such a declaration express ever so positively that either God or the Priest absolves them, it is a fatal error to build hopes on this, with respect to another life, any further than conditionally, that if their repentance be sufficient, their forgiveness is certain. But whether it be sufficient or no, the Priests of our Church can give their judgment, and those of the Church of Rome can possibly do no more. For they must own themselves to be as fallible as we are.

But as neither reason nor Scripture makes confessions and absolution of this kind necessary, so neither did the primitive Church hold it to be so. Public confession indeed they required in cases of public scandal: but for private confession in all cases it was never thought of as a command of God for 900 years after Christ, nor determined to be such till after 1200: when the same Council of Lateran decreed it, which decreed also the deposing of such princes as would not extirpate heresy. And yet it is amazing what stress they now lay upon it. No repentance, they tell us, will avail, if it be neglected: and almost

He had been laying amongst them, he says, the foundation of religion, the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ. *On this,* says he, *another man hath built: but let every man take heed how he buildeth;* what he teaches for Christian doctrine: *for the day shall declare it, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is:* either the day of the fiery trial of persecution, or rather, the final judgment of God, *whose day shall burn like an oven* *, this shall try every man's work, search it as thoroughly as fire does things that are put into it. Then, *if any man's work which he hath built, abide,* if the doctrines he hath taught bear the test, *he shall receive a reward:* but *if his work be burnt,* if, preserving the fundamentals of Christianity, he hath built errors on them, *he shall suffer loss;* the pains he hath taken shall be of no benefit, and though he may be saved himself, it shall be like one that escapes through the fire, with great danger and difficulty. For so St. Jude speaks: *Some save with fear, pulling them out of the fire* †: and the prophet Amos, *Ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning* ‡. This passage therefore relates not to punishing, in purgatory, the persons of some men, before the Day of Judgment, but to trying the works of all men at the Day of Judgment: and far from patronizing the Church of Rome, gives them indeed an awful warning not *to build on the foundation* of Christianity *hay and stubble;* such useless trash as this, and many other of their doctrines; which that great Day of the Lord will show to have no solidity in them: but *their works shall be burnt up, themselves suffer loss, and at best be saved only so as by fire.* Their other texts for purgatory are, if possible, less to the purpose than this: that *blasphemy*

* Mal. iv. 1. † Jude, ver. 23. ‡ Amos iv. 11.

from henceforth, from the hour of their death, *for they rest from their labours**. But miserable, says the Church of Rome, are many of the dead that die in the Lord, for a long time after, for they rest not from their labours, but labour under most grievous sufferings. But indeed, even their own apocryphal Scriptures might have taught them better than this. *The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them*†. Nor is their plea from antiquity better than that from Scripture. For though many had adopted strange notions of these things, out of heathen fable and philosophy, into the Christian religion, yet purgatory, in the present Popish sense, was not heard of for 400 years after Christ; nor universally received even in the Western churches for 1000 years; nor almost in any other church than that of Rome to this day. But supposing there were such a place, how do they know concerning any particular person that he ever comes into it, or how long he stays in it? And if not, what is it but *offering the sacrifice of fools*‡, to make thousands of prayers for one, who may be quite out of the reach of them, either in Heaven, or perhaps in Hell? Though indeed, by praying for the very wickedest of men, as only in purgatory, they strongly tempt other wicked men to conclude, that none of their communion ever go to Hell. And thus is this invention at once so great a terror to good persons, and so great a comfort to bad ones, that one cannot help applying to it the Prophet's words: *With lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad: and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked*

* Rev. xiv. 13. † Wisd. iii. 1.

‡ Eccles. v. 1.

(which they are not, for nothing is so but what appears to come from God,) would condemn, and not justify those prayers which the Papists use.

Another Popish method of relieving sinners is by indulgences. Originally this word meant a very right thing, the mitigation of the severity or length of ecclesiastical censures towards such, as, by an exemplary repentance, had deserved it. Nor was any other sort of indulgences known for at least 600 years, perhaps much longer. But the present notion of the Church of Rome about them, (though in their disputes with us they would fain disguise it if they could,) is this. Many of the Saints, it seems, having not only done enough to merit immediate entrance into Heaven, but more than was necessary for that purpose, this overplus of their goodness, called usually works of supererogation, joined with the infinite merits of Christ, makes a treasure of inestimable value, which the church hath the disposal of, and the Pope, as head of the church, applies towards the remission of their sins, who either fulfil in their lifetime certain conditions appointed by him, or whose friends will fulfil them after their deaths. Now we, on the contrary, have learnt from Scripture, that in many things the best of us all offend; that, were our obedience perfect, it were no more than our duty; and that, to the grace of God, not to the merit of our works, the salvation of our souls is owing. In some respects indeed, in useless mortifications and observances of no value, we acknowledge many saints of their church have done much more than God requires, much more than he approves or will reward. But even had they done more really good things than they were obliged to, this might indeed increase their own happiness in another world: but what pretence

disclaimed their principles. And indeed, as angry as they are with that happy event, they have great reason to be thankful for it, on account of several changes for the better, which it has produced amongst them, especially where part of any country have been Protestants. For elsewhere all their abuses are kept up. And for one proof of it, I have now in my custody a plenary indulgence granted for a small piece of gold at Rome this very year* to an absolute stranger, for himself, for his kindred to the third degree, and to thirty persons more for whose names a proper blank is left in the instrument. So that had not the Reformation given them some check, God knows whether by this time Christianity had been discoverable under the changes and disguises which the prevailing part of them would have deformed it with. Consider but to what lengths matters had already gone, in this one article of the remission of sins. The necessity of confession put the secrets of every man's heart and life into the breast of the priest, and the power of admitting into Heaven, or excluding from it, forced the bigotted sinner to do whatever should be enjoined him. In how monstrous a manner this power was used, the histories of all nations dreadfully show. And then to preserve it from growing quite intolerable, an artifice was added that made it still more fatal. It is too well known that mankind will do any thing rather than their duty, and part with any thing sooner than their vices. On the terms therefore of submitting in other points, they were made easy in this favourite one. The strictest rules of life indeed were laid down for such as thought themselves bound to be strict: but for those, who desired to be otherwise, superstitious observances

* 1745.

and with Hell we are at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us, for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: therefore thus saith the Lord God—Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with Hell shall not stand: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then shall ye be trodden down by it. Judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place *.

Yet therefore, Beloved, to conclude with the words of St. Peter, *seeing ye know these things, beware lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness: But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* †. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

* Is. xxviii. 15. 17, 18. † 2 Pet. iii. 17, 18.

faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him *. But a little consideration will show that what St. James appoints is very different from what the Church of Rome does. In those days miraculous gifts were common: that of healing diseases in particular: and the persons who had these gifts were usually the Elders of the Churches, whom the Apostle here directs to be sent for. And as miracles, in condescension to the genius of the Jewish people, to whom this Epistle is directed, were accompanied, for the most part, with some outward act of ceremony, by the performer of them; (a practice which our Saviour himself often complied with;) so the ceremony used in healing the sick by miracle, *viz.* anointing them with oil, was one to which the Jews had been accustomed; oil being a thing of which much use was made in the Eastern countries, on many occasions †. Accordingly we read, that, when our Saviour sent out his Disciples with a power from Heaven to cure diseases, though he prescribed to them no particular form for that purpose, yet they adopted this: *they anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them* ‡. Now what the Evangelist tells us they did, is evidently the very thing which St. James directs the Elders of the Church to do. And therefore, since the anointing mentioned in the Gospel was

* James v. 14, 15.

† See Wheatley, on the Office for the Sick. And Grotius on Mark vi. 13. says, the Jews used it when they prayed for the sick, to express their hope of obtaining from God in their behalf that joy and gladness which oil signifies. Preservative against Popery. Tit. vii. c. ii. §. iv. p. 62.

‡ Mark vi. 13. The Council of Trent had at first said that Extreme Unction was *instituted* in this place, but afterwards changed that word for *insinuated*. F. Paul in Preserv. p. 64.

in the word *if*, shews, he is not speaking of a Sacrament instituted purposely for the remission of sins, as the Church of Rome make their unction to be. And indeed this relates to the very same thing with his former words. For, as bodily sickness and infirmity was frequently a punishment for sin; (whence, to mention no other proofs, St. Paul tells the Corinthians *, *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep;)* so, the very form of miraculously healing a person of these infirmities, used by our Saviour is, *Son, thy sins be forgiven thee* †: that is, the illness inflicted on thee for thy sin is removed. Since therefore St. James promises forgiveness of sins in just a like case, we are certainly to understand him in just the like sense; *viz.* that if the sickness of any person prayed for were the punishment of any sin; that punishment should be remitted, and his health restored. Now this forgiveness of the temporal punishment of some particular sins, which is what St. James promises, the Church of Rome does not promise from this ceremony; and the forgiveness of the future punishment of all those sins, that the sick person hath ever committed by his bodily organs, which St. James does not promise, they do. Though indeed it is a little hard to conceive, when all a man's sins have been already forgiven; (as they say they are, by the priest's absolution:) how any of them should want to be forgiven again, perhaps by extreme unction, the moment after. But the truth is, they themselves lay not near so much stress on this ceremony's procuring pardon of sin, as its procuring composure of mind, against the terrors of death. Now most evidently this expectation St. James hath not said one word to countenance: so

* 1 Cor. xi. 30. † Matth. ix. 2. See also John v. 14.

the time of their health, as to need the least spiritual assistance that is possible, in the time of their sickness: and that what they do need, they would all apply for early, when it might be of great benefit to them, and not content themselves with calling in the minister at last for mere form's sake, when he can do them little good, or none.

Another point, in which we differ from the Church of Rome, is, that all their public prayers are in the Latin tongue, ours in our own. This sure at least is no heresy, that, when we pray to God, we all know what we say. Our practice justifies itself. But how is theirs justified? Reason and common sense plainly condemn it. Antiquity is no less against them: for every Christian Church originally had their own service in their own tongue. That of the Western world was in Latin, only because Latin was their common language: and therefore, it should have been no longer in Latin, when that ceased to be their common language. And for Scripture, read but the 14th chap. of 1 Corinthians, and see, what St. Paul would have judged of this Romish practice. Even when there was a miraculous gift of tongues in the Church, and men prayed, or prophesied in strange languages by inspiration; even then he requires such persons to keep silence, unless another were ready to interpret publicly what they spoke: for, says he, *Brethren——Except ye utter words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak into the air. If I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say amen, at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? I thank my God*

of their prayers, indeed a great part of the mass, it would be useless to have said in their own language; for the priest is ordered to speak it so low, that it cannot be heard: as if one fault would excuse another, instead of making it greater. But many of their prayers, they say, may be understood: for though spoken in Latin, there are printed translations of them in English. But still, great part of them is not translated, unless it be by some very modern indulgence *: and that which is, nothing but our making them ashamed of themselves hath forced them to of late in these parts of the world against their will. For we know that when, within this last century, some well meaning bishops of their own Church in France, had published the mass in the vulgar tongue, for the people's use, the then Pope declared them sons of perdition to all the world, and condemned what they had done, as if it were the overthrow of religion †. So that, for aught we know, the same liberty taken here may fall under the same condemnation, when a proper time comes. Or were the contrary ever so certain, still putting their prayers into English for the people, only shows that they ought to be spoken in English by the priest: for this round-about way is evidently a most absurd one; that he should be praying in one language, and they following him by guess, as well as they can, in another. Besides, multitudes of their poor people have never heard of these translations, or at least, have them not: multitudes more are unable to read them: and all these must be left quite in the dark. But we are

* The English translator of the order and canon of the mass, hath omitted many of the ceremonies, particularly above twenty crosses out of less than thirty. Tennison on Idol. p. 5.

† Tillotson, Serm. 246.

leave, it is never granted where they dare refuse it, excepting to such as they are well assured beforehand will see nothing there but what they are bidden. So that where they have permission to read the Scripture, they have none to understand it. Besides that, this permission, even in those countries where they are obliged to indulge it the most freely, as in our own, is but during pleasure, and may at any time be taken away when it will serve the turn better: nor dare the poor deluded people, upon pain of damnation, help themselves. And as to Protestant translations, having one is looked on as a mark of heresy; for which in this very nation, poor creatures have been burnt, and their Bibles with them. Which practice now, think you, is the righter, theirs or ours? What authority can there be on earth to forbid any part of mankind from reading what Heaven hath revealed to them. It is the law of our lives, the foundation of our hopes; God hath given it to us, and man hath no right to take it from us. But they tell us, it is from kindness they do it: for there is great danger that the Scripture may be misunderstood and perverted: *unlearned and unstable men* *, St. Peter hath declared, *may wrest it to their own destruction.* Now this is possible indeed: and so it is possible every thing may be applied to an ill purpose: health, strength, food, liberty, common daylight: but is this a reason for taking away any of them? It is possible that persons may do themselves harm by having the Scriptures: but is it not something more than possible, that they may suffer harm from the want of them; and *be destroyed,* as the Prophet tells us, *for lack of knowledge* †? Why do not these persons, who are so very cautious in this

* 2 Pet. iii. 16. † Hos. iv. 6.

Yet notwithstanding that, *I charge you by the Lord*, says he, *that this Epistle be read unto all the holy brethren* *. Did then the ancient Christians, in whose days there were heresies in great plenty, did they restrain any of the people from reading the Scriptures, in order to preserve them from heresy? No: the Romanists do not pretend it. They well know, that a man's delivering up his Bible was always, as it ought to be, the mark of apostacy from religion. They know there is no one thing almost so much insisted on by fathers and councils as the necessity that all persons without exception should be well acquainted with the word of God. Thus little apprehensive was the primitive Church of any danger from this practice. The Church of Rome, we own, has some cause to be apprehensive. For had the people once general liberty to read and judge from Scripture, there is great danger they might come in general to see, what now they who do see dare not own, how widely it differs from the doctrines commonly taught them; we acknowledge then they are *wise in their generation*. The Scripture is against them; and they will be against the Scripture: lower its credit as far as they dare: keep it out of men's hands, where they can: and where they cannot, they pervert it by false translations, obscure it by false glosses, and *make it of none effect* by setting up a pretended authority of interpreting it to quite another thing than it evidently means. We, God be thanked, need not these arts, and we use them not. We permit, we beseech, we require you all to read the Scriptures diligently, and judge of their meaning impartially; to compare with them every thing we teach you, and believe nothing but what you find agreeable to them. We

* 1 Thess. v. 27.

ble remains of heathenism very little disguised: their engaging such multitudes of people in vows of celibacy and useless retirement from the world: their obliging them to silly austerities and abstinences of no real value, as matters of great merit: their excessive veneration of relics, most of them fictitious and unfit to be thus honoured, were they ever so genuine: their inventions of romantic legends and lying miracles, which make weak and unlearned persons believe any thing, and too many of those, who see through them, believe nothing. And besides these and other errors in spiritual matters, there are many more of most weighty consideration in temporals, which they zealously maintain: their claim of punishing whom they please to call heretics with penalties, imprisonments, tortures, death; their excommunicating and deposing kings; their forbidding divine worship through whole nations at once; their annulling the most sacred promises and engagements, when made to the prejudice of their Church: their drawing, by wicked artifices, the wealth of all countries to the support of their own tyranny. But many of these things I have set in a proper light to you on other occasions, and dwelling on all would be endless as well as unnecessary. Enough, I hope, hath been said to shew you which are in the right: and that *this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.* For observe: as the whole claim of the Church of Rome depends upon her being in all points infallible: so, if in any single point she proves to be mistaken, her pretence of being believed in the rest falls intirely to the ground. But indeed, though for your fuller satisfaction I have confuted many of her doctrines, yet any person may have sufficient satisfaction of his own being in the right way, without so much as knowing or having heard

is dreadful arrogance, therefore, which the Church of Rome shows in this respect; coining new articles of faith, some of which they own were not articles of faith from the beginning, and sentencing men to Hell for not believing what, before that sentence, themselves acknowledge nobody was bound to believe. This, you see, is changing the terms of the Christian covenant arbitrarily, and making a new Gospel at their own pleasure. But in opposition to their decisions and anathemas, hear one of St. Paul: *Though an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we* the Apostles of Christ, *have preached, let him be accursed.* Trust then yourselves on this foot: for *other foundation can no man lay, than that which* they *laid**. Nor indeed did the primitive Church, for several hundreds of years, attempt it, or make any doctrine necessary, which we do not: as the learned well know from their writings; and the unlearned may know from the most ancient of their Creeds, which we now use in our constant service. Afterwards indeed needless additions first crept in, then false ones: but, had they begun ever so much sooner, our cause had received no prejudice. *To the law and to the testimony,* as the Prophet directs, we appeal: *if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them* †.

* 1 Cor. iii. 11. † Isaiah viii. 20.

in this one body there are many members; and why are not the Churches of Greece, Asia, and Africa: why is not ours, as true a member of it as theirs? On what authority, if names were worth disputing about, do they ingross that of Catholic to themselves? Do not we profess the true Catholic faith, that faith which the universal Church received from the Apostles? We profess it much purer than they. Are the Sacraments more duly administered by them than by us? Far from it: for of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, one half they have taken away from the laity: and concerning the other half, they have taught the most monstrous absurdities, and built on them the most shocking idolatry. Then, for that of Baptism, we administer it with water alone, just as Christ appointed, whereas they have added oil, salt, spittle, and I know not what, as if it were on purpose to make it as unlike his institution as they can. Is then the appointment or ordination of their clergy more valid, or more regular than ours? On no account whatever. For if they brought down the succession uninterrupted to the reformation, we have certainly preserved it uninterrupted since; which now they may be ashamed to deny, since a learned man of their own Communion hath fully proved it. And consequently, for them, who are but a very unsound part of the Catholic Church, to call themselves the whole of it, is quite as absurd, as for a diseased limb (though perhaps the larger for being diseased) to be called the whole body. But they will say, we separated, and so cut off ourselves from the Catholic Church, at the reformation. I answer, we did not. We only cast out, as was our duty, the errors that were crept in: and we did it by the lawful authority of our superiors, both ecclesiastical and civil. Upon which

necessary. For were a man to separate himself from every Church he knows on earth, in order to obey the laws of Christ, he would still be a most valuable member of that *general assembly and Church of the first-born, that are written in Heaven**. *For what communion hath light with darkness?—And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?—Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty* †.

But 'tis an article of faith, they tell us, that the Church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all Churches, and therefore to cast off her authority, can never be lawful. We answer, the mother of all Churches, she certainly is not. For in Jerusalem was the first Christian society, and from thence were derived many others, more ancient than that of Rome. Nor was that Church the mother of the British Churches, nor of all the English. But had the first persons that founded the Gospel here been sent from Rome, that had given them no manner of authority over us. Whence is she then the mistress? Why, St. Peter was head of the Church, and the Bishops of Rome are his successors. But the Scripture tells us, *Christ is head of the Church* ‡, and tells us of no other. We own it was said to St. Peter, *upon this rock will I build my Church* §. But this rock, for aught they can ever prove, might be, not St. Peter's person, but his confession made immediately before: that *Jesus was the Christ.* Or, if the Church was to be built on St. Peter, yet not on him alone, but *upon the foundation of all the Apostles and Prophets,* as St. Paul teaches expressly ‖. And accordingly,

* Heb. xii. 23. † 2 Cor. vi. 15, 16, 17, 18. ‡ Eph. i. 22. iv. 15.
§ Matt. xvi. 18. ‖ Eph. ii. 20.

the wall of the new Jerusalem, or Church of God, is said to *have twelve foundations*, on which were *the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb* *. To St. Peter indeed it was promised, *that the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven should be given him*, and that *whatever he bound or loosed on earth, should be bound or loosed in Heaven* †. But this very same, and other as great things, are said to all the Apostles equally ‡. St. Peter was appointed by Christ to *feed his sheep* §: but so surely was every one of them. The first rank therefore he might have among the Apostles; but authority over them not the least. On the contrary, St. Paul tells us, that *he withstood St. Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed* ‖, and says of himself, in two different places, that he was *in nothing behind, not a whit behind, the very chiefest Apostles* ¶. But had St. Peter possessed ever so much authority, what is that to the Church of Rome? Why; St. Peter was Bishop of Rome. But even this is what they can never prove, nor is it probable. Or if he was, perhaps it was only of the Jewish Christians at Rome. For St. Paul tells us *the Gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to him, and that of the circumcision to Peter* **; and the Jewish Church there is extinct. Or if Bishop of all Rome, he was Bishop, they say, also of Antioch; and why must their Church inherit his authority more than that Church? But why indeed must it be inherited at all? It was given personally to St. Peter as an Apostle: what had others to do with it who were no Apostles, though they did succeed him as Bishops? All pre-eminence of one Church above another was nothing originally, but an institution of

* Rev. xxi. 14. † Matt. xvi. 19. ‡ Matt. xviii. 18. John xx. 23. § 1 John xxi. 15, 16, 17. ‖ Gal. ii. 11. ¶ 2 Cor. xi. 5. xii. 11. ** Gal. ii. 7.

men for convenience and order. Rome being the chief city in the world, it was natural to look on the Bishop of Rome as the chief Bishop. And precedence being thus allowed them; by time and opportunity, and arts that were often very wicked ones, they improved it into a claim of authority: to which, though not near the whole Church ever submitted, yet at length a great part did. Then to the prerogative, of which they had thus by degrees got possession, they begun to pretend Christ himself had originally given them a right. And having managed so well, that part of the world believed them, and part durst not contradict them; they took on them the title of universal Bishops, which one of themselves not long before had declared, whoever should take, was the forerunner of Antichrist. And then under this they claimed all power over the souls, bodies, and fortunes of men, and exercised it with all possible insolence, rapaciousness, cruelty and impiety.

Now what could there be done when such a power was thus acquired, and thus exercised, but to throw it off, and assert that liberty to which we had an undoubted right? For as to any scheme of coming to terms, never did the Church of Rome recede from any one pretension she ever made. The exercise of authority she hath omitted indeed, whenever she durst not exercise it: but all her claims she hath constantly kept up, and excommunicates yearly to this day, every Prince in Christendom that shall refuse obedience to any constitution of the Pope's whatever. 'Tis true, even the Popish Princes at present regard not this excommunication, and she knows not how to make them regard it. But were once the Protestants reunited to that Church on the terms of allowing her any superiority: who knows how soon a

power, that had once risen from nothing to that formidable height which it had attained, may rise again to be as formidable as ever?

Another of their pleas is this: that which was the ancient religion and Church must be the true one. Now where was your Church, say they, before Henry the VIIIth? Where was your religion before Luther? We answer, our Church was before that time just where it is now. Only then it was corrupted with many sinful errors, from which it is now reformed. Still 'tis the same Church it was before: just as a man formerly addicted to many vices, and afflicted with many distempers, continues the same man, after he hath forsaken the one, and recovered from the other; and it would be very strange to make his alteration for the better an objection against him. And for our religion: where was that before Luther? Why, wherever Christianity was. Did Luther invent the Creed, the ten Commandments, the two Sacraments? These are the things in which our religion consists: and theirs consists in the same. Only they have added by degrees, a number of needless, false, and wicked things to them, which we have cast off again. Our religion therefore is the ancient Christianity, professed from the days of the Apostles. But where was their religion in those days, I mean the doctrines in which they differ from us? All of them, hundreds of years later; many of them a thousand; some of them established no longer ago than the council of Trent, which is since the time of Luther. For then, and not before, was it, that they filled up the measure of their iniquities, which had long been growing; equalled their own traditions to the word of God, and added a new Creed to the old one. Our rejecting their additional doctrines, we own, is new;

and no wonder: for the doctrines themselves are new. Some of them indeed reigned much too long: had they been rejected sooner, it had been the better: but better late than never. Still, our denying these, is no more part of our religion, properly speaking, than our denying Mahometanism, or the idolatry of the Chinese, is part of our religion. Were it not for their pressing them upon us, our people should never hear them mentioned. We take no pleasure in exposing their absurdities, but are heartily grieved at them: and have much better employment for our hearers than these controversies, did not their restless endeavours to pervert men, make it sometimes necessary.

But this plea of their Church being the most ancient, they sometimes put in a different form: and tell us, that either the Romish Church established here before the reformation was the true Church, or it was not. If it was, why do we protest against it? If it was not, how can ours be a true Church, which is derived from it? The answer is very plain. In one respect, as their Church professed the fundamentals of Christianity, it was, and is a true Church: and so far ours is derived from it. In another respect, as it obscured and contradicted them by unjustifiable doctrines and practices, it was not a true Church; and so far we protest against it. Their truths we have preserved: their errors we have rejected. In one sense we are the same Church with them still: in the other we are not the same, but a much better.

Another way which they have of arguing against the reformation, is aspersing the characters of those who were engaged in it, and ascribing bad motives to them. Now as to this: if the main thing done was right, as it plainly was, what sort of instruments God

up in legends and fables to amuse and mislead the ignorant. We, for our parts, leave them to make a noise with fanciful ways of being religious; and doubt not, but we please God much better by performing quietly the real duties of life. And though we acknowledge and lament that a failure in these is too general amongst us, yet we must remind them, when they insult us upon this, that there is no where on earth more vile and more open wickedness, than where Popery reigns without controul. If, when they live under Protestant governments, they live in a more Christian manner, we are heartily glad of it. But still we hope, even here the lives of our people are not worse than theirs: and we are sure it is not the fault of our religion, if they are not much better.

But, they tell us, however these things may be, yet their Communion is undoubtedly the safer of the two. For they say we cannot be saved, and we own they may be saved: and that Church is plainly the safer, in which both sides acknowledge salvation is to be had. But consider: does their saying we are not safe, make us ever the less so in reality? The question is, upon what grounds do they say it? Why, upon none at all, as I have shewn you. And therefore all they can prove by saying it, is their own confidence, of which those persons have generally the most, who have the least reason for it: and their own uncharitableness, for which, if we at all understand Christianity, no one side will ever be the safer. Well: but we do not deny, that they may be saved. No more do I or they deny, but even a virtuous Heathen may have some degree of happiness in another life. Suppose then he should take it into his

head to deny that a Christian could, must I turn Heathen to be of the safer side? You see it is just the same case. But after all, do we lay it down as a rule without exception, that all Papists may be saved? We dare not say so. Some of them go much more unjustifiable lengths than others: the ill things that many of them do, they do in ignorance: this we hope, will be an excuse for them in a great measure. Yet, even for the most ignorant, their salvation is grievously hazardous, amidst so many corruptions, which, one should think, even they might perceive to be such, and so many temptations to neglect that *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord* *. The condition of the learned amongst them, who, when the light is before their eyes, continue in darkness and keep others in it, is still more dangerous. But in the worst state of all are they, who being born *children of light*, return to darkness again: and sin wilfully after they have been bred up amongst us in the knowledge of the truth. Yet even among these there are very different degrees of guilt. Such whose good meaning hath been misled by plausible artifices, we would still hope well of: though doubtless they must have been sinfully negligent of informing themselves concerning the grounds of their first belief; else they had never left it. A second sort, who depart from what, in their consciences, they believe is the truth, merely because a presumptuous man tells them they cannot be saved if they adhere to it, these are much more blameworthy than the former. But for such as, either from the love of worldly interest, or the wretched hope of reconciling sin and salvation together, turn aside from the way of

* Heb. xii. 14.

righteousness, and forsake that pure and holy Communion, which the good providence of God had placed them in; as to such, we cannot judge favourably, and we will not judge hardly; *there is one that judgeth* *, *who will also render to every man according to his deeds* †: but indeed we can see no promise of their finding *mercy in that day*. Suffer not yourselves then to be moved either by vain threatenings or false promises, nor ever think to be safe in any other way, than that of first enquiring carefully, what your duty is; and then keeping close to the practice of it. Be assured it is safe to worship God, through Jesus Christ, and let all other worship alone; safe to receive the holy Communion as our Lord himself gave it, to pray in a language you all understand; and make that holy word *which was written for your learning* ‡, the foundation and rule of your faith, your practice, and your hopes. Fear not but you are safe in doing thus; whether the Romanists be safe in doing otherwise or not. God grant they may! but God forbid that any of us should try. Bear with me now but a few minutes longer, whilst I give you in conclusion some seasonable directions for your behaviour towards those of that Church.

First then let none of their bad doctrines or practices ever tempt you in the least to any hard treatment of them, any incivility or secret ill will towards them. Justice and mercy, equity and charity, are main parts of religion: and a failure in these is one of the worst heresies into which we can fall. We know the Church of Rome hath failed in them greatly; our ancestors have felt their cruelty; our Protestant brethren abroad groan under it at this day, and may God

* John viii. 50. † Rom. ii. 6. ‡ Rom. xv. 4.

In the next place, let nothing which hath been said make those, who are not some way called to it, over forward to dispute about these matters with persons of more learning and art than themselves. For a man may have very good reasons on his side, and yet be so little qualified to set them in the best light, that an excellent cause may be hurt by want of skill in managing it. What I have endeavoured is only that you may *be able*, as St. Peter directs, *to give an answer to them that ask you a reason of the hope that is in you* *. In doing which, remember you are concerned only to be on the defensive. They are to prove, if they can, that every one of their doctrines is not only true, but an article of faith, and every one of their practices not only lawful, but necessary. Till they have done all this, you have no reason to change: and when they have done it, we allow you to change. But observe one thing: if you hear them deny any of the points with which they have been charged, do not be staggered at it. Would to God they were not guilty of them; they would be more in the right, and we should be never the less so. But do not think a charge unjust, because they confidently say it is. The more ignorant of them here among us, perhaps, do not know the worst part of their doctrines: and the more learned will not own them till they are forced. These concealments are no new things with them. In some countries many of their missionaries have concealed a great part of the Christianity they pretended to teach, and allowed Heathenism to be blended with it, in order to make converts, such as they are, the more easily. No wonder then if here they veil over their corruptions with a fair mask, which, if we do

* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

not pull off, they will not throw off, till the proper time comes.

Another thing is, if ever you should be pressed with any of their arguments which I have mentioned, and not perhaps remember the answer to it, still remember you have heard it answered; and any one of you may, at any time when you desire it, have the answer repeated and farther explained to you. Or if any other argument should be used, to which you cannot of yourselves reply, consult those that can: tell us your difficulties in time; be assured such as would keep you from this do not mean honestly; give us but a fair hearing before you determine to leave us, and we doubt not your staying with us. Even if any of you should be unhappily brought to think favourably of some of their doctrines, remember still how monstrous others of them are: and yet, if you do not swallow all, you have done nothing. We allow persons to have very different opinions from us in some points, and suffer them to continue among us as very good Christians notwithstanding: but their Church makes no abatement: their very grossest errors must be professed, or you are none of them. Think well then what you do; and, as I once advised before, never let subtlety and sophistry, whether you know exactly how to answer it or not, prevail against Scripture and reason; but ever stick to the plain word of God, and plain common sense.

One direction more I have of the utmost importance; which is, if ever we would secure ourselves to good purpose against the dangers of false religion, let us carefully promote the profession and practice of the true. If persons are bred up in no knowledge of, and no zeal for, the principles of their own Church, no

wonder that they are easily carried off and seduced into another. If they are encouraged to live without regard to God, many of them however will be afraid to die so too; and then that Communion, which makes the largest promises of forgiveness on the easiest terms, will be almost sure to be embraced by them. Men, wise in their own imaginations, think they are sure to root out superstition, if they plant infidelity. But mankind must and will have some religion; and if they forsake a good one, sooner or later the uncomfortableness of unbelief, and the terrors of conscience after a wicked life, will drive most of them to a worse. Besides, whilst we are divided and negligent about these matters, the emissaries of the Church of Rome are united and active, and never with more sanguine hopes, than when they can plead experience, that the liberty allowed by the Protestant religion leads men of course to throw off all religion. These are plain reasons for a public regard to piety and virtue: and there are yet more important ones for a private conscientious practice of them: for that, after all, is the only thing that will establish us in the truth, fill our hearts with peace and comfort in this life, and give us everlasting happiness in the next. If then you have any concern either for the honour of that Church to which you belong, for the welfare of your country, or the salvation of your souls, *let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ**. Pity and pray for them who are in error, that God would *give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth* †, *and building up yourselves,* as St. Jude exhorts, *on your most holy faith, keep yourselves in the love of God; looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life* ‡.

* Phil. i. 27. † 2 Tim. ii. 25. ‡ Jude, ver. 20, 21.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen *.

* Jude, ver. 24, 25.

END OF VOL. III.

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